TIBETAN REFUGEES IN INDIA:
THE CASE OF BYLAKUPPE IN KARNATAKA

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Tibet lies at the center of Asia, with an area of 2.5 million square kilometers. The earth’s highest mountains, a vast arid plateau and great river valleys make up the physical homeland of 6 million Tibetans. It has an average altitude of 13,000 feet above sea level. The status of Tibet has been a subject of contention and polemics in one form or another for well over a century. The core of the conflict has been the positions held by Tibet and China in this regard. The heart of China’s position has remained steady that Tibet is an inalienable part of it (Elliot: 2004). The Chinese invasion on Tibet begun during 1949 (CTA), it was on 10th March 1959, an anti-Chinese and anti-Communist popular revolt erupted in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, which had been under the reign of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since 1951. The authorities in Beijing kept the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in Tibet on the defensive for ten days, but on 20 March they ordered the army to crush the rebellion (Chen: 2006).

One week later, the 14th Dalai Lama, Tibet’s political and spiritual leader escaped from Chinese occupied Tibet and fled to India, followed by about 80,000 Tibetan refugees (Bhatia et.al: 2002). On 28th March, Zhou Enlai, the premier of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), formally announced the dissolution of the Kashag (the Tibetan local government), putting political power in Tibet into the hands of the “Preparatory Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region” (Chen: 2006). The Indian prime minister at that time, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, helped make land available for refugee settlements in several states of India and Nepal. The Dalai Lama also established a government in exile at Dharamsala in the Himalayan foothills of Himachal Pradesh (Bhatia et.al: 2002). At present, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (2000), the Tibetan refugees belong to the 70 per cent of the world’s refugees who are displaced within the developing world.

When thousands of Tibetans escaped to India, either out of loyalty to the Dalai Lama or out of the fear of persecution at the hands of Chinese forces, for the most part, they followed the old trade routes through Bhutan and Nepal. These routes were later brought under the control of Chinese border guards to stop the Tibetans from escaping into India. If caught, the Tibetans were either sent back home or sent to prison. Due to these developments, they started going through paths which were wrought with difficulties. These paths traversed snow-covered, 6,000- meter long mountain passes,
where the Tibetans could travel only at night (Rathee: 2010). No accurate statistics are available on the number of Tibetan refugees. The official estimates made by the Indian government are undependable, and in any case do not include the number of children born since the refugees arrived in India. The situation in the mountain states, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim is even less calculable, since in these countries many refugees have remained in remote mountain regions that are difficult of access. But it is clear that the birth-rate has exceeded the death-rate, especially in the more settled communities (Conway: 1975). According to unofficial estimates, the Tibetan refugee community in South Asia today has grown to 121,143. Almost 70,000 of them live in the settlements; the remaining 50,000 live in scattered communities in India and Nepal (Wangmo: 2008). With the assistance of government of India, Nepal, and Bhutan, and of the United Nation’s High Commission for Refugees and with the tenacity of Tibetan refugees themselves, 54 refugee settlement have been successfully established in India, Nepal and Bhutan since 1959. These include 26 agricultural, 17 agro- industrial and 11 handicraft-based settlements (Wangmo: 2008). And, as per the data published out of its first demographic survey conducted during 2000 by the Planning Commission of Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), 46 refugee settlements scattered across India are the home to most of the 100,451 Tibetan refugees in South Asia (Samphel: 2010).

Establishing Settlements

The process of rehabilitating Tibetan refugees in India developed through various stages. It became clear that the permanent settlement for Tibetans was the direction. On appeal from the Dalai Lama, Nehru, consulted the State Governments regarding the possibility of permanently rehabilitating Tibetans in settlements based on agriculture, agro-industries and handicrafts. A number of States were able to respond positively. A few States, based on Prime Minister Nehru’s appeal, leased forest reserve and unused land to the refugees for agriculture and settlements (Jorden: 2000).

Soon after seeking asylum in India, His Holiness the Dalai Lama negotiated the establishment of the Tibetan Government in Exile with the Indian authorities and in April 1959 Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) was formed. The CTA has been reorganized as the Tibetans’ sole and legitimate government and has set itself the twin task of rehabilitating Tibetan refugees and restoring the freedom of Tibet (CTA: 1998). The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) located in Dharamsala is a government-in-exile, headed by the 14th Dalai Lama, and it lays claim to be the rightful and legitimate government of Tibet. The CTA is not officially recognized as the ‘government-in-exile’ by any country, but it still receives huge financial support from various governments and international organizations across the world. The CTA’s structure is that of a constitutionally democratic state, with an elected Parliament and Prime Minister. It is seen as the sole representative of the Tibetan community in exile. When the CTA came into being, around 45 lay and 80 monk officials of the Lhasa administration formed the base of the organization (Rathee: 2010). They were mainly aristocrats and monks, as also the only ones who had received education and were qualified to handle the affairs of the government.
Tibetans are registered with the Central Tibetan Administration which is a working body in the ‘Tibetan Government in exile’ and not with the UNHCR. The Tibet Fund is the primary funding vehicle for institutions and grassroots organizations that provide health care, education, refugee rehabilitation, religious and cultural preservation, elder care, and community and economic development programs for the exile community. The Tibet Fund works closely with the departments of Finance, Health, Education, Home, and Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Dharamsala, India to maximize resources and anticipate needs in the community as 3,000 refugees per year make the dangerous crossing over the Himalayas to freedom (TFAR: 2007). Each Tibetan settlement has a settlement officer who is the Representative of the Department of Home appointed by Central Tibetan Administration (CTA). Moreover, the overall wellbeing of the settlements is taken care by the Central Tibetan Administration. The Government of India has very minimum role of governance (Wangmo: 2008).

India’s Stand

When the refugees from Tibet first began to arrive in India in 1959, the responsibility of their rehabilitation was entrusted not to the Home Ministry but to the External Affairs Ministry, headed by the then Prime Minister Nehru. After the Chinese invasion on Tibet, thousands of Tibetans fled to India following His Holiness the Dalai Lama. When in 1960 Indian authorities and the Dalai Lama’s representatives decided that the refugees should be rehabilitated in permanent settlements, Nehru as Prime Minister wrote to the various Chief Ministers of Indian states, asking for spare tracts of land for the settlement of Tibetan refugees (Tom: 1987). At the same time, India was not party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and had no refugee law. But, in 1996, Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution’s guarantees of life and personal liberty protected refugees from refoulement. But, at the same time, India’s Citizenship Amendment Act of 2003 defined all non-citizens who entered without visas as illegal migrants, with no exception for refugees or asylum seekers (WRS : 2007).

Tibetan refugee settlements in India had been deliberately designed in such a way as to recreate Tibetan society with its core values intact. Such a recreation of pockets of Tibetan culture and society in India was not only the popular desire and determination of refugees from Tibet. It was to a large extent, endorsed and even encouraged by the Government of India as a matter of policy. Two critical aspects of India’s policy towards the Tibetan refugees are; (1) the liberal ‘non-assimilative’ framework as reflected in the separate settlements and (2) the broad ‘delegated’ authority of the Tibetan leadership headed by the Dalai Lama over the Tibetan Settlements in India. Such a benevolent policy ensures Tibetan cultural identity and social autonomy in a sea of host population (Norbu: 1992). We have also noticed the glimpses of religious and cultural autonomy given to the refugee population in the settlement. Most of the refugee respondents also hailed the Indian government’s policy of not interfering with the religious and cultural life of them. They admit that they have been enjoying complete freedom in this regard.
Bylakuppe

Bylakuppe by its very name means ‘a place of rains’ (Anees: 2008). According to one earlier study during 1970s, there have been altogether six resettlement projects in Karnataka for the Tibetan refugees. Of them, Lugsung Samdubling at Bylakuppe is a major one. It is the earliest one and established in 1960s (Pulman: 1982). Some other sources claim that the establishment of this settlement started in the year 1961 when His Holiness Penor Rinpoche reached here. He also established Namdroling Monastery in 1963 (Rigzod: 2006). He came to Bylakuppe with 600 followers who had taken refugee and placed their trust in him. During 1963, there were only ten monks. But during 2006, it increased to 5713 registered monks and over 3000 of them are currently resident (NNI: 2010).

Mysore Rehabilitation and Development Agency (MYRADA) took up the responsibility of giving settlement houses. The settlement has 1800 (approximate) acres of land for construction of housing and for cultivation. It is about 87 kms from the southwest of Mysore City. This settlement consists of 16 villages and each having an average of 40-50 families. All the villages are situated in different locations at a distance of about 2-3Kms to each other. It lies on a flat plain at an altitude of approximately 2750ft above sea level and the temperature ranges between 24 to 35 degrees Fahrenheit with an average rainfall of 42” to 45” annually (Wangmo: 2008). As per the estimates given by Bhatia (2002), Bylakuppe old and new camps totally constitute 3620 monks in the monastery during 1994-96. Anyhow, this estimate is very less than the new estimates.

Method

The method and tool for data collection are decided taking into consideration the nature of the field, human resource (16 student members) and time available (14 hours in two days) for data collection. At the beginning, the researcher planned to do a survey of 30 per cent sample using simple random sampling with Tippet’s table for the selection of households. But, after visiting the field, we understood that it is difficult to do that for three major reasons. They are: (1) we are not familiar with their language and only two interpreters are available with us. (2) Most of the respondents were hesitant to meet the outsiders. (3) It needs at least 30-45 minutes to complete interaction with members of each household as it involves translation for both sides.

Finally, the researcher decided to collect data using a structured interview guide instead of doing a survey. Household stands as the basic unit of analysis. Convenient sampling method is used to select a sample of 50 households and their members are interviewed. We found convenient sampling method is suitable as most of the respondents were hesitant/not interested to answer/respond to our questions and this method has given us flexibility to select the most informative respondents from the field. In addition, focus group interviews were conducted to elicit information on education, religion and problems faced by them in the refugee camps. After the collection of data on both the days, the participants sat together and discussed the information collected to check their validity, uniformity and to minimize errors.
Some of the obvious limitation that can be mentioned here are the time constraint, hesitant attitude of the respondents and unfamiliarity with the respondents’ language. Apart from these limitations, as mentioned earlier, since we have not used interview schedule or any other survey methods, the validity of the data lacks quantitative authentication. The scope for employing statistical tests is also limited. However, the methods employed in the current study stands justified considering the constraints mentioned above. The tools used for data collection (structured interview guide and focus group interviews) are also empirically accepted and are valid ones.

Moreover, though the ideas derived and the focal areas of the study are initiated out of the field visit done and the primary data and observations recorded from the field, the present report is prepared also taking into account the secondary data already available in the form of reports, research works and data banks. This is mainly because of the fact that the data collected through the field visit is not completely sufficient to prepare a comprehensive report because of all the limitations mentioned above. Therefore, the secondary sources are used extensively to corroborate and substantiate the claims and observations made out of the field visit and are acknowledged properly.

**Socio-Demographic Composition**

Though no official estimates on the accurate number of Tibetan refugees in India is available, estimates show that it ranges between .65 to 1 lakhs. These estimates also show huge variations. A study by Bhatia (2002) represents that as per the data collected during 1994-96, 65,000 Tibetan refugees were living in India. Of them, approximately 55,000 refugees were living in 37 settlements widely distributed around India. The remaining 10,000 refugees were monks living in monasteries associated with some of the settlements, mostly in the south of India and is increasing roughly 1% per year from 1994 (53,293) and 1995 (54,047). Pulman Lynn (1982) has quoted that there are around 80-100,000 Tibetan refugees in India during 1980s itself. He also cited Woodcock (1980) as estimating the Tibetan population in India ranges between 65,000 to 70,000 for 1970 and Conway’s (1975) estimates of 80,000 and 100,000. Quoting Dalai Lama, Dawa Norbu (1994) says that, of the total Tibetan population of six million, 82,546 to 85,000 are refugees, 80 per cent of whom are resettled in India with the second highest concentration in Nepal. According to a study by Smith (1996), 100,000 Tibetans came to India following the exile of Dalai Lama during 1959 and the numbers might have been increased now. Of this, the refugee settlement in Bylakuppe is a major one housing a sizable proportion of the Tibetan refugees in South India as mentioned earlier.

As per the statistics given by Bhatia (2002), 23,247 Tibetan refugees present in the various refugee settlements in the South India during 1994-96. This constitute 42.6 per cent of the total (54,537) Tibetan refugee population at that time. Of them, a substantial number of women in the 20–24 age group, about half of those in the 25–29 group, and a large majority of the 30–34 year group are married. The data also reveal that a substantial bulge in 10–24 year age range. There were slightly more males than females in the young and old age groups, the age distribution did not differ significantly between
males and females. As for as the population in Bylakuppe is concerned, of the total of 3520 in both the old (3465) and new (55) camps, a sizable proportion belong to the age group of 10-19 (1147) and 20-29 (1659) during 1994-96. Moreover, it also shows that of the total, only 1016 born in India and the birth place of the majority (1600) of the rest is Tibet. Anyhow, the Tibetans of Indian origin goes on increasing and as evidence 72.7 per cent of the monks in the new camp of Bylakuppe are born in India during the above mentioned survey. It is observed that only the upper middle aged and elderly (50 +) are available at home during the daytime as others are either gone for work or do spend their time in the monastery. It is also noted that a considerable number of youth are being educated in institutions across the nation, and are available at home only during the vacation period.

Houses in the Bylakuppe settlement are Indian type. They are made of bricks. The type of roof varies with respect to the affluence of the inhabitants. It is noted that a majority of the houses are tile roofed followed by concrete ones. Huts are rare in the settlement. A considerable number of houses have a sizeable hall with a bedroom and kitchen situated in an average area of 3-4 cents. Majority of the houses have toilet facility. Houses are neither congested nor scattered. One visiting the settlement can also see bungalow model houses in some camps (especially in camp 2 and 3). It is reported that these houses are built either with the financial support from CTA or from United States. In some other cases, the occupant families have at least one potential earner abroad. It is also remarked that big houses are a new phenomenon in the settlement begun after 1990s. Indian breed dogs are seen in a number of houses along with cattle. A considerable number of houses are fenced around though it is not common in their native country.

**Religion & Culture**

It is a well known fact that all the refugees in the camp belong to Buddhism. None of them in the camp have got converted to any other religion during their exile here. Their knowledge about other religions is also limited. Entire life of the Tibetans in general and the Tibetan refugees in particular revolves around their religion. In fact, the current crises and their sustained struggle are also not only because of the patriotic feel they have, but also emerged out of the strong religious beliefs and sentiments that they are cherishing forever. Moreover, the interconnection between politics and religion in Tibet and Tibetans elsewhere is also a well known fact. According to Kolas (1996), “the notion of the ‘religious land’, the polity based on and legitimized by religion, is reflected in the Tibetan concepts of chos srid gnyis ldan, the dual religious and secular system of government and of chos rgyal, the king as protector and patron of religion. Chos rgyal is a Tibetan expression for the Buddhist conception of Dharma king: the king who turns the wheel of the law. In the case of Tibet, the crucial status of the Dalai Lama epitomized the political system”.

Tibetan Buddhism, rather than a secular nationalist ideology, provides vital idioms for the political discourse on Tibetan independence. Tibetan history also commonly
recognizes the close ties between religion and politics in Tibetan culture (Kolas: 1996). Dawa Norbu (1992) maintains that the distinction between Tibetan and non-Tibetan was a Buddhist differentiation between believers and non-believers. Anyhow, at present it is also alleged that the educated English speaking exile elites have taken up a ‘modern’ or secular variety of ethnic nationalism while propagating the Tibetan cause specifically for a Western audience (Kolas:1996). The problem with the notion of cultural autonomy in Tibet, however, is that it also encompasses the political dimension since the cultural and religious head of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama, is also the political head of the Tibetan community. While the Tibetans want to control all their affairs, save foreign, defence and currency, the Chinese are not willing to concede to them more than the right to worship (Muni S.D.: 2008). In fact, the religious and political head of the Tibetans are the same and is based on their strong belief in the reincarnation of Lord Buddha himself. Thus religion and politics is closely connected in Tibet and the life of Tibetans elsewhere in exile.

The life of the refugees in the settlement also revolves around the Buddha temple in one way or the other. Moreover, it is an important tourist attraction in Karnataka. His Holiness Penor Rinpoche began construction of the Golden Temple in 1995 and it was completed in 1999. One who visits the temple can understand that it was constructed according to the tradition of Tibet and the sculptures and paintings inside also depict it. Among the Tibetan exile community, it is one of the famous temples. Inside the temple, one can see big statues of Buddha Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, along with the statue of Guru Padmasambhava also known as Guru Rinpoche on His left hand side and Buddha Amitayus, the Buddha of Long Life on the right side. The paintings on both sides of the three statues depict the 25 disciples of Guru Padmasambhava who attained high realizations through practice of Dzogchen teachings. The height of Buddha Shakyamuni is 60 feet while the other two are of 58 feet from the base. These statues contain scriptures, relics of great beings, small clay mould stupas, and small statues inside that leave the onlookers spellbound.

Delineations on the wall behind the three statues are the goddesses of offering. The paintings of the sides of the third floor show the life story of Lord Buddha and twelve great teachers of Dzogchen. Portrays on the walls of the second floor represent the eleven throne holders of the Pulyul tradition and the great scholars and masters of the Nyingma tradition (two major traditions of Buddhism in Tibet). Near to the Golden Temple, one could see a replica of Palyul Monastery in Tibet now occupied by China. This replica was built in 2009 by His Holiness Penor Rinpoche to replace a previous one built by him in 1980. H H Penor Rinpoche is the 11th throne-holder of Palyul monastery and also the founder of Namdroling monastery. To the left of Golden Temple lies a small garden which is well-maintained like the lawns in front of the Golden temple. Just opposite to the Golden Temple, on the other side of the road, a small shopping mall is present where one can buy Tibetan handicrafts and artifacts.

In this context, it is appropriate to quote the observation given by a student team. Their observation is as follows: “When we first entered Bylakuppe, our impressions
were of a mixed community of ethnic Tibetans and native Indian agriculturalists living in mutual symmetry. On the ride into town we saw Tibetans in the typical garb of a contemporary Indian commoner—off-colored cotton slacks and button-down shirts—riding on motor scooters and talking with Indians in the dust brown streets. Bright purple-robed monks sped around in exhaust-coughing rickshaws. The shops that lined main street were a smorgasbord of Tibet and India. Tibetan craft markets stood eave to eave with Indian spare-part outlets. Except for their obvious physiological features, the Tibetans seemed to be nearly indistinguishable from the Indians. But, as we learned more about the history of the camp and its religious fervor, these melting-pot impressions quickly faded. Anyhow, during the discussions at the end of the fieldwork, majority of the students are of the view that the Tibetan refugees are living with all efforts to protect their own traditional culture and are successful in this regard. A good observable example is their unchanged dressing pattern. One can also attribute their cultural sustainability to the religiosity that they have. The link between their religiosity and culture is obviously seen in many occasions. It is also inferred that this link has helped them to protect their culture irrespective of their close and functional links with the local population.

**Education**

Of the total Tibetan refugee population in India, up to 1992, 3000 students in exile completed their university education. Every year 400 to 500 students finish their secondary school education. Today education in exile has produced Tibetan medical doctors, administrators, Ph.D’s, engineers, post graduate teachers, journalists, social workers, lawyers and computer programmers etc. It is also estimated that 98% of Tibetan refugees are literate (Wangmo: 2008). Of the total refugee population, as per the data available during 2001, “the younger cohort is mostly educated through secondary school. This disparity in educational attainment can be illustrated by comparing three of the age groups. Of those in their 20s, nearly 60% have secondary education and 12% attend(ed) college, while only 5% have no formal education. Of those in their 40s, only 27% have a secondary education, 6% attend(ed) college, and 30% have no education. Among those in their 60s, only 1% have secondary or higher education, while 63% have no formal education. Those in their 20s were born and educated in India, those in their 40s came to India as children, while those in their 60s came to India as mature adults reflecting the literacy rate in Tibet 30 or more years ago” as per the 1994-96 data (Bhatia et.al.: 2002).

In this context it is appropriate to elaborate our experience in the camp. In spite of the turmoil of resettlement process, educational facilities in the Bylakuppe settlement stand as a beacon of the possibilities that accompany hard work, cultural dedication, and the necessary steadfastness with the international aid. At the Save Our Souls (S.O.S.) school, which serves as a boarding house and educational facility for orphaned and refugee Tibetan children, supplies are plentiful. They even have a computer room that most secondary schools in our nation would envy about. Everything is neatly organized, and the children seem healthy and happy. But, the sad part of it is that one of the
respondents says that only around 55 per cent of the students at the S.O.S. school still have parents, and they all either reside in Tibet or are scattered throughout various localities in India. The children were sent to this school so they would have better opportunities. The educational instruction at the S.O.S. refugee school was modeled off the traditional Tibetan system. Songs, art, and activities are the main teaching methods. Tibetan culture is also emphasized in the schooling system. A teacher asserted that “They have a lot to learn about the motherland, and it is our job to teach them.”

**Economy & Occupation**

Of the total Tibetan refugee population in India, during 1994-96 farming occupy 16% of the population, followed by sweater selling (6.4%), full-time housewives (5.2%), handicrafts such as carpet making (5.1%), and military service with (5.0%). Only 2.4% claimed to be unemployed, while 16.4% were too young or too old to be working. *Bylakuppe* is also no exception even today to this trend in terms of its occupational characteristics. Farming and sweater selling have been observed as the major occupations in the settlement. It is also told by the respondents that in most of the families, during the winter season, male members go for sweater selling across the nation. This observation is also corroborated by an earlier study done by Pulman (1982). He observed that *Bylakuppe* concentrate their effort on raising maize two or three crops per year. According to him, a hybrid form of the crop is first introduced here and got good yield. Anyhow, this settlement doesn’t have proper irrigation facility and hence depend on monsoon rains. Millet is also grown to cater home needs. But at present, it is noted that due to monsoon failures, only one or two crops are happening per year and most of the people are shifting to other occupations mentioned earlier.

Tibetans in *Bylakuppe* molded their fields into fertile oases, which have become so profitable to the extent that laborers from the local Indian community are now regularly employed to cultivate them. The native Indian populous of *Bylakuppe*, who themselves were highly impoverished, resented the fact that the Tibetan refugees were provided with such amenities from the Indian government and international community. Essentially, the handouts given to the fleeing Tibetans allowed them to achieve a much higher living standard within a single generation than the Indian population had ever known in millennia of agricultural toil. This seeming inequality sometimes fueled violent conflicts between the local Indians and Tibetans during the initial stages of the Tibetans’ settlement (Shepard.P: 2008). According to a Tibetan community leader, this strife has lessened and the refugees and Indians now live in harmony. “We go to their celebrations and they come to ours,” he says. Yet doubts remain as to how harmonious this apparent symbiosis between the ‘well-off foreigners’ and the impoverished locals could be possible.

The economic status of the refugees in *Bylakuppe* is observed between satisfactory to good comparing to the economic status of the people in the host nation where a considerable number of people die of hunger and above 30 per cent of the population
live Below Poverty Line. This observation is supported by one earlier study by Goldsrein (1978). According to him, “Within five years of starting the settlement, the refugees at Bylakuppe had became a tremendous economic success” He also observed very little manifestation of the dysfunctional behavior commonly associated with the ‘refugee syndrome’. Saklaini (1984) gives three reasons for the Tibetan success in India, Firstly, the Tibetans are hardworking people. Secondly, their womenfolk also work as hard as men, if not more. And thirdly the Tibetans have a natural instinct for trading. It is observed from the field that the local economy of the people in the settlement largely depends on farming, sweater selling and handicrafts. At the same time, one cannot deny the fact that a number of youth from the settlement also got employment in lucrative private concerns in India and abroad. Moreover, the Funds from Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), United States (US) and other independent well-wishers also contributed to the enrichment of the local economy in the settlement.

Health Status
Health aspect of a community cannot be scaled without using proper techniques of enquiry. At the same time, demographic profile of a community would be incomplete without a mention on health status of it. Taking this into account, some specific points are drawn out of interaction with the people in the settlement and through the review of secondary data already available in this regard. Here, special attention has been given to bring out some health issues relating to their refugee status rather than the general health issues that may be attributed to any population.

Tibet, ‘the roof of the world’ is one of the coldest parts of the world. Most of the people who flee from Tibet to India find it difficult to cope with the hot climatic conditions here. As mentioned earlier, the refugees in the settlement can be divided into two major category viz. 1. Those migrated from Tibet and 2. Those born in the settlements in India. According to a source by Bhatia (2002), about 63.4 per cent of the Tibetan refugee population in India during 1994-96 is Indian born. Most of the refugees who have migrated from Tibet felt the hot climate here comparing to Tibet. They also said that it took some time for their body to adjust with the climatic condition here and suffered general health problems relating to climatic change at the beginning. On the other hand, their Indian born counterparts do not feel the hot climate to that extent as they are used to it. Bhatia (2002) has presented the general health status of the Tibetan refugee population as follows: “Data compiled quarterly from the health clinics showed that the common diseases of developing countries (skin conditions, upper and lower respiratory tract infections, fevers, diarrhea, tuberculosis, parasitic and other infectious diseases) abound in the settlements. Cancers were the leading causes of death, followed closely by pulmonary tuberculosis, of which 35% were thought to be due to drug resistant strains”.

Family and Marriage
Family is the basic economic and social unit in the life Tibetans. It plays a major role in the primary socialization of the Tibetan children in exile especially in a way to preserve
the culture and tradition of Tibet. In most of the cases, members of the family collectively own production and enterprises. Though the traditional Tibet is known for extended and joint family types, in the present settlement one can see more number of nuclear families than that of the other types. Likewise, though polygamy was quite common in the traditional Tibet, monogamy has become most prevalent in the present settlement except rare cases of polygyny. In many ancient societies, however, multi-wives families were common, and most Tibetan kings have several wives. Public gatherings are considered appropriate occasions for boys to meet girls. Romantic bonfires in the moonlight draw boys and girls together to sing and to worship. After a period of courtship and permission, each family has granted to the marriage. An elderly gentleman is asked to propose the marriage to the bride-to-be’s parents. According to tradition, only the maternal uncle of the girl has the right to approve. Suitable gifts are presented to the bride’s family once approval has been given. The wedding ceremony is followed by a joyful wedding feast, which is liberally interrupted by many presentations of ceremonial scarves, blessings, and gifts. So many that sometimes the groom and bride are nearly buried beneath the large number of scarves tied around their neck.

Tibetan refugees in India have the social autonomy due to the benevolent policy of India for the perseverance of Tibetan traditions and culture. During our field work also, it is observed that they prefer to marry their own community people and inter-marriages between the Indians and the Tibetan refugees are very rare. Thus it is largely an endogamous society. They respect the institution of marriage and the married women have a different dressing pattern from that of spinsters. It is also observed that the household tasks are divided among the members. Gender division is seen in the allocation of work though they have not vehemently acknowledged it. They respect elderly and the principle of seniority that prevails in their family helps them to command respect from other family members. The male head of the family usually controls the family and take decisions. The family system is largely patriarchal in nature.

Dream & Nostalgia
The team has also noted that the refugee population has not been completely relieved off the trauma they faced due to ‘Chinese invasion’. Most of them (especially 50 + age group) are still hesitant to meet outsiders and are nostalgic. They believe in going back to their home nation once the dispute got settled. A survey conducted by Wangmo (2008) in Bylakuppe reveals that 47 per cent of the migrated refugee population left Tibet owing to persecution followed by the second largest of 23 per cent owing to the departure of H.H. the Dalai Lama. Her survey in Bylakkuppe also exhibit the fact that about 86 per cent of the population in the settlement wish to return Tibet once the dispute settled. A study by Crescenzi et.al (2002) also shows the high degree of anxiety and depression among the Tibetan refugee population in India. This scenario has been observed also during our fieldwork with them.
When our team walked down the roads of the Bylakuppe settlement and through the little paths of it, we got the impression that these Tibetan refugees have formed a utopia in the dawn of their dislocation. Yet no matter how idyllic this scene seemed, one occupant told us that they would gladly leave all their earnings here to rot for the chance to reclaim their homeland. As she explains, “Anybody would love to be in their own country, anybody would love to be with their own mother.” This sentiment seemed pervasive throughout the camp; all bearings pointed worth in preparation for the great return. This has always been the plan, and its reverberations have been carried through three generations.

When the team sitting at the home of one elderly member of the settlement, he told us with sad old eyes that all he wanted to do is to return to Tibet before he dies. But, said in despair “I may not be able to and none of the refugees can”. He also resented the fact that the Chinese emigrants have saturated Tibet, and Tibetans are now a minority in their own country. The once forbidden holy city of Lhasa is now a tourist carnival, and the Chinese still rule with violent supremacy. We also couldn’t help but question the refugees’ determination to return to Tibet. They seem to live a life in India that is far more comfortable, luxurious, and prominent than the people of Tibet have ever lived. There is a constant stream of foreign aid coming in, and most families have at least one member sending money from Western countries. The refugees are well off in India, but this does not seem to have any effect on their emotional attachment to the ideal of their motherland. “We are always dreaming of our return to Tibet,” said most of the respondents. But, taking into consideration the present political standoff between Tibet and China, it seems only a distant dream for them.

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