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Tibetan Refugees as Objects of Development: Indian Development Philosophy and Refugee Resistance in the Establishment of Lukzung Samdrupling, the First Tibetan Refugee Settlement in India

The paper looks at the development philosophy behind the establishment of the Lukzung Samdrupling, the first Tibetan refugee settlement in India and how it was received by the refugees. After reviewing Chinese development concepts in the 1950’s and 1960’s with an emphasis on Tibet, the paper explores the central concepts of Indian development philosophy at that time, such as cooperative, scientific farming and modern family planning, and how they were implemented in the design of Lukzung Samdrupling. Based on documents in the old settlement files the impact of various development schemes as well as resistance among the refugees are also highlighted with a special focus on the role of the foreign donor organization Swiss Technical Cooperation. In conclusion, the paper points out the irony in escaping from Tibet to avoid becoming objects of Chinese development philosophy only to become objects of a similar Indian development philosophy, and suggests that the planners conceived Lukzung Samdrupling as a model for rural development intended to show the benefits of modern life to people in the surrounding area and to bring development to an underdeveloped region of the country.

Tibetan Refugees to India

What happens when a group of geographically, socially, and culturally displaced people land in the lap of development agents who have a distinct vision of how to create a modern society? In what ways do such a disenfranchised people accept—or reject and resist—social engineering projects designed to transform them into modern beings? These are the central questions addressed in this paper on the establishment of Tibetan refugee settlements in South India. The poignant irony to this story is that, in fleeing the modernizing forces that a communist China had launched on Tibetan society, the refugees came under the sway of an Indian socialist development philosophy that resembled, in startling ways, the very system they had abandoned everything to escape.

In the aftermath of a failed uprising in 1959 against China’s rule, the Dalai Lama fled into exile in India followed by tens of thousands of refugees. After an initial adjustment period whereby refugees lived in transit camps, a major effort was initiated to find more viable housing and employment opportunities for the displaced Tibetans. Lukzung Samdrupling, located west of Mysore city in Karnataka state, was the first Tibetan refugee settlement established in India. Located by the Cauvery River near the Kodagu Hills, it remains the largest Tibetan settlement in exile. The construction of the first camp started in 1960 through an agreement between the Dalai Lama’s private office, the Government of India, and foreign donor organizations, notably Swiss Technical Cooperation (Swiss Tech). Agriculturally based settlements were an alternative to the Himalayan road camps where thousands of refugees had been put to work by the Indian government, and where the relief work was ill-managed and poorly coordinated (Magnusson et al 2009).

From India’s point of view the relocation of the refugees to agricultural settlements was an opportunity to bring large-scale, donor-sponsored projects to the less developed rural areas in the country. The location of Lukzung Samdrupling near the village of Bylakuppe was carefully chosen after a survey carried out by the Indian Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Dalai Lama’s Private Office, and Mysore’s state government. It was decided to develop 3,000 acres of land leased by the state government to provide a means of
livelihood for 3,000 refugees. When the first group of settlers arrived in late 1960 they encountered a recently prepared clearing, surrounded by forest, which had been drained and fitted with tents. A few bamboo cottages housed administration offices. The rehabilitation of the refugees was managed by an Indian “Divisional Officer” in cooperation with two representatives from the Dalai Lama’s Private Office. The settlers were immediately put to work clearing the forest for farming and constructing a village of semi-detached brick houses. But progress was slow and the subsistence needs of the refugees could not be met according to plans. To sort out the problems, foreign advisors from Swiss Tech were brought in to take charge.

In a research project looking at the early development of Lukzung Samdrupling, I have studied the old records and registers kept at the settlement’s administrative office. Working through this material I could not help noticing how the refugees and their settlement are often treated as objects of modernization, and how the establishment of Lukzung Samdrupling was not just about relief, but about making modern people. This modernization project is clearly represented by the methods of Swiss Tech. The settlement’s geography, the principles for land distribution, and the camp design also show that Lukzung Samdrupling was constructed for modern—and not traditional—Tibetan living.

In this paper I investigate the background of relief and modernization, rehabilitation and development, and why they were implemented in the settlement of Tibetan refugees. The joint forces of foreign and Indian development agents had what seemed to be a highly malleable population of development subjects who could be molded into modern beings in line with development philosophies of that time. But as we shall see, modernization schemes unleashed on the refugees often failed to consider normative family systems and other cultural issues. The result was a continuous series of subtle acts of resistance by Tibetans so that they could shape development schemes to better fit their own lived realities and aspirations.

DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL ENGINEERING

The Tibetan refugee situation coincided with a surge in national development planning, especially in the context of the new post-colonial nation states where economists were advocating planned social development by means of large-scale state interventions. It was widely believed that the main cause of underdevelopment and poverty was overpopulation. The proposed solution was economic growth through industrialization, scientific agricultural methods, and population control. Goals were to be accomplished through the involvement of professional experts in policy-making, an approach to social development that is often labeled “social engineering” or “technocracy.”

This rational approach, in hindsight, has been called “evolutionary functionalism.” As Robertson notes, “planning became a credential of and a necessity for independent statehood” because it “creates an image of the state as technically capable and democratic” (1984: 34). In the era of planned development the modern nation emerged as an economic machine in which scientific planning of the economy would break the chains of traditional life, elevate the nation above its underdevelopment, and gradually saturate all aspects of life thereby turning the population into modern individuals participating in a national economy (Robertson: chapter 1).

One of the central issues in development theory to which the “underdevelopment” problem of the new post-colonial states was partly attributed was the population issue. In the process of planned modern development, the family and fertility were viewed through the lens of an economic concern. Development economists, such as Myrdal, expounded the need for post-colonial governments to adopt population control policies in order to speed up development. Without planned population growth, “the rise of levels of living and the spread of all the other modernization elements will be severely retarded” wrote Myrdal (1987:531). The idea was for parents to become “rationally intentional” with their reproduction (Ibid: 536).

Fleeing south from Tibet to India, the refugees became objects of India’s planned social development schemes and subjected to the development policies intended for any population living in an “underdeveloped” nation at that time. As a consequence, the refugees were socially and economically re-organized. The interventions indirectly attempted to redefine kinship relations by pulling the population into global processes wherein it became an object and participant of development, a receiver of aid from foreign donors, etc.

The planning and establishment of Lukzung Samdrupling was truly a modernization scheme, at least from the policymakers’ and planners’ point of view. At their hands they had a community from a traditional, semi-feudal society, organized in clans and extended families that was displaced from its physical place of home. As we shall see, Lukzung Samdrupling came to bear the hallmarks of an Indian model settlement, designed according to principles of small family life and scientific agriculture. Ironically, it also reflected a developmental ideology that was being implemented by China on the Tibetan Plateau from where these refugees had fled.

OBJECTS OF DEVELOPMENT

Chinese development philosophy during the Mao era was characterized by Soviet inspired ideas of mass industrialization, collectivization of agriculture, and central planning as manifested in programs like the first Five Year Plan (1953 - 1957) and the “The Great Leap Forward” (1958 - 1962). Maoist socialism is often associated with agrarian socialism although the Five-year plans also tried to kick-start economic growth through massive infrastructural projects and the establishment of heavy industry, sometimes with disastrous re-

1. The project titled “The South Indian Tibetans” was funded by the Swedish Research Council and the Crafoord Foundation.
sults like the great famine that transpired between 1959 and 1962.

When China moved on Tibet in the 1950s, part of the purpose was to "liberate" the people by acting as an agent for social change in what was perceived as a backward society with an oppressed people who had been misled by Western imperialistic forces (Hasmath and Hsu 2007: 126). From the Chinese perspective, Tibet's social system had to be replaced by a modern and rational communist system and developed by the same means as the motherland. It was believed that the people of Tibet needed China's assistance to rid themselves of the oppressive yoke and that the country would be better off integrated in the Chinese nation state (Norbu 2001).

In the beginning China's government employed a gradualist and pragmatic strategy to modernize Tibet by encouraging industrial production, business ventures, scientific agriculture, social reforms, anti-slavery campaigns and redistribution of land to weaken the aristocracy (Hasmath and Hsu 2007: 126, Goldstein 2007).²

After the Lhasa uprising in 1959 China abandoned its gradualist strategy and adopted a more repressive and harsh policy. The Chinese government disregarded the 1951 agreement to support development in Tibet without eroding Tibetan autonomy and initiated socialist reforms with little respect for Tibetan sentiments. Officially, the reforms led to an increased production of just about all goods, but the statistics of this period are unreliable. During the 1960s, Tibet's economy continued to be based on agriculture and animal husbandry, and it was not until the 1970s that people's communes started to become established (Dreyer 2003: 412-414).

In 1960 Ginsburgs and Mathos reviewed China's impact on Tibet during the 1950s,³ emphasizing the construction of an infrastructure for transportation and communication to secure dominance in the region. According to reports at that time, Chinese technology and expertise seems to have had a strong impact on Tibetan agriculture. Mechanized and scientifically based agricultural methods were introduced by advisors and supplemented by financial support (Ginsburgs and Mathos 1960a: 105-106). Although the natural resources of the Tibetan plateau had been surveyed, Tibetan industrial development continued to be marginal.

Ginsburgs and Mathos (1960a, 1960b) argue that despite the Chinese physical impact on Tibet in the 1950s the social changes were limited. The reforms "concerned only the fringe areas of Tibetan life" (1960: 123). A point they make is how China tried "to win the allegiance of the disenchanted sections of the Tibetan population through a show of Chinese technical skill" and build a "goodwill [...] among the masses" (1960b: 123) as a platform for introducing future social reforms.⁴

Birth control and family planning policies in China in the 1950s and 1960s vacillated between two positions, often in response to shifts in Chairman Mao's position and ideological struggles within the Communist Party. On the one hand the policy was influenced by ideas associated with contemporary development theory and its explicit link between planned economic development and birth control. On the other hand was the view that China needed workers to build a socialist economy, and that birth control was an imperialist policy and foreign encroachment. This position was reinforced by conservative Chinese family values. Referring to this dialectic process, researchers of family planning have described the Mao era policies as a "tentative approval of individual 'birth-control' (jiezhishengyu)" (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005: 47) or a "stir and hush" muddle (Scharping 2003: 43). However, when birth control was advocated, it was in the context of planned economic development.⁵ As rapid industrialization led to a large in-migration from rural to urban areas, and demographic calculations of the population growth rate made possible by the 1953 census were pointing towards a population of 800 million by 1967, the leadership seemed to have been forced into birth control realpolitik.

The birth control policy was developed on a gradualist template:

There should also be a ten-year program for family planning. However, it should not be promoted in the minority nationality areas or sparsely populated regions. Even in densely populated areas it is necessary to try it out in selected places and then spread it step by step until family planning gradually becomes universal (quote from speech by Mao at the Enlarged Third Plenary Session of the Eight Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, October 9, 1957 published in Tien 1980: 87 pp).

Educational campaigns were launched in larger cities, followed by explorative campaigns in rural areas. Starting in 1958 an infrastructure reaching down to provincial level was being established in order to implement population control targets. But by the start of the Great Leap Forward the efforts were halted as the views of leaders and intellectuals reverted back to the pro-natalist and anti-imperialist position, only to swing back again in 1962. It was not until the mid 1960s that rural areas and villages in several provinces became objects for birth-control policies. Evidence suggests that birth-control ideas such as “respecting the limit of two children” were spread throughout China by party cadres and the PLA during the Cultural Revolution (Scharping 2003: 48). By the early 1970s slogans such as “one child isn’t too few, two are just

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² See also the 10-point document laying out the terms for the peaceful liberation of Tibet (Goldstein 2007:37).
³ Ginsburgs' and Mathos' articles mainly rely on newspaper reports in Chinese and Western newspapers. It is obvious from the text that, although the authors are critical of the Chinese presence in Tibet, they take a positive view on modern development.
⁴ On this subject, see also Goldstein 2007:38.
⁵ See, for instance, a speech by Mao in 1957 on the necessity of birth-control (Tien 1980: 87).
fine, three are too much” and the principle of “later” (births), “longer” (birth intervals), and “fewer” (children) became the official policy in China (ibid: 49). It was only in 1978 that the one-child policy became the law of the land, but in reality China’s birth control policy was a patchwork affair. People living in rural areas and members of minority groups could generally have more than one child (Gu et al. 2007).

According to several sources (see Scharping 2003 table 1) birth-control policies were not officially implemented in Tibet until 1975, although in reality they were only implemented starting in the mid–1980s in urban areas and a few years later in rural areas (Goldstein and Beall 1991). By the late 1980s the official policy in Tibet was that rural dwellers could have three children, but in reality many families continued to exceed this limit without being penalized (Goldstein et al 2002).

In summary, after 1959 China launched a concerted attempt to modernize Tibet through various policies aimed at industrializing the economy, mechanizing agriculture, organizing farmers and herders into collective units of production, and limiting population growth. Curiously, China’s development approach to Tibet resembled in many ways elements of India’s philosophy for modernizing rural segments of its economy shortly after gaining independence.

INDIA’S PLANNED DEVELOPMENT

Comparing Chinese and Indian development philosophies in the 1950s and 1960s reveals more similarities than differences. Both worked within a socialist framework that emphasized industrialization and scientific agriculture, advocated centralized planning and state interventions to increase economic growth, and envisioned birth control as a prerequisite for achieving a modern society. Both philosophies also assumed a view of the citizen as a cog in this great economic machinery, and as someone who willingly would participate in the development project.

At the time of the planning and construction of Lukzung Samdrupling the Indian government was just departing on its third Five Year Plan (1960-1965). The second Five Year Plan (1955-1960) had sought to accelerate industrial development and was a manifestation of the Nehruvian vision of social change (named after India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who held the office from 1947 to 1964). It was, as the Indian economist Sukhamoy Chakravarty suggests, a blueprint for a “profoundly interventionist” development philosophy and an expression of “state interventionism” (Herring 1999). When the Indian National Planning Committee was formed in 1938 with Nehru as its chairman, its preferred methods of intervention were via state regulation and co-ordination, including state owned and state controlled key industries, banking and public utilities, and a cooperative reorganization of agriculture (Nehru 1956: 400-409).

Like many students of Nehru’s vision of a modern India, Chakravarty (1987: 9) points out that it was strongly influenced by Fabian socialism (see also Tyson 1966 chapter 2). Fabian socialism is a pragmatic, incremental and reformist rather than revolutionary approach to change that is similar to the social democratic ideology that guided governments in countries like Sweden during this era. In contrast to China’s Maoist approach in Tibet after 1959, Nehruvian reforms did not target private capital, rich landowners or the middle class. The good society was to be realized through centralized and scientific planning in order to achieve growth and, in the long run, the social equality that was central to Nehru’s thinking. It was, as Akbar (1988: 466) writes in his biography of Nehru, “socialism with a scientific face” (“scientific humanism”, as Nehru himself called it) designed to create a modern society based on science, not only in the sphere of production but all the way down to family life (Ghosh 1997, Gopal 1984).

Nehru, like many leaders of the post-colonial states, accepted the development economists’ new global discourse that emphasized the need for structurally backward nations to catch up. India after independence was economically vulnerable in the world system but the state was strong (albeit perhaps “soft” in Myrdal’s sense of the concept). The whole idea of embarking on a rapid social and economic development can perhaps be seen as a logical response from Nehru and the Congress Party as responsible for reasserting control over the “underdeveloped” Indian society. Planned development becomes an instrument of state legitimacy, a self-justification of its centralized authority (Bose 1997: 53, Chatterjee 1994: 204, see also Herring 1999, Robertson 1984: 26). For Nehru, the development of heavy industry such as steel, power and machine building plants, the communication and transportation sectors, the oil industry and parts of the chemical industry was the only road to socialism. As Gopal (1984: 163) summarizes Nehru’s vision, “there could be no socialism without technological growth.”

The third Five Year Plan turned to the development of agriculture, with collective farming as a key objective. Unlike in China, collective farming was neither accomplished through the establishment of peoples’ communes nor through land reforms other than the abolishment of the Zamindar system in 1948 (a feudal system of revenue rights). Cooperative organization was seen as the primary agent of agricultural development and the “highest form of socialism” (Bhuleshkar 1969: 33). It was believed that the key to solving India’s problems lay in socialism in its “scientific economic sense” and as a philosophy of life (Nehru, speech 1959 cited in Bhuleshkar 1969). But Nehru put his own brand on it by recognizing the individual freedom of the farmer:

The only way open to us is […] the co-operative movement. Through co-operation alone can the individual, the small individual, keep his individuality intact, his freedom intact and yet function in a big way and take advantage of science
and technology (Nehru addressing the Indian Co-operative Congress in New Delhi, April 12, 1958. Cited in Bhuleshkar 1969: 33).

The cooperative model was popular among governments in developing countries in the 1950s and 1960s, not only in Asia but also in Africa. Many believed it would create the necessary social cohesion for the modernization project to work (Robertson 1984: 160). Indian planners found inspiration in the co-operative side of the British agricultural movement emerging in the second half of the nineteenth century and the German rural credit unions pioneered by Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen in the 1860s. Many British co-operatives centered on group purchases of farm inputs, but from the beginning of the twentieth century they also started to tenure small land holdings, bottle cheese, and make milk (Goddard 2000).

For Indian planners the idea of a multi-purpose cooperative extended beyond credit and farming input to include various business and service activities. The first two Five Year Plans had attempted to centralize the control of cooperatives and enforce production targets, but with little success. In the third Five Year Plan the planners changed direction and were now talking about cooperatives as a model for decentralized democracy and a “prime mover for organizing” (Bhuleshkar 1969: 35) agriculture, irrigation, small industry, processing, marketing, distribution, supplies, rural electrification, housing, construction and the provision of essential amenities for local communities in order to achieve higher production, diversification, an expansion of the realm of technology and more employment opportunities within the rural economy (Third Five Year Plan, chapter XIII: 200). It was also believed that cooperatives would allow poor farmers to become less dependent on private moneylenders and big landowners. Nehru looked at the cooperative as a higher form of social organization, a “glimpse of socialism” that would foster a lifelong attitude among members that prepared them for a fully developed socialist society (Gopal 1984: 114, 116).

The cooperative would, in the view of the planners, serve to facilitate mechanization of agriculture and the introduction of scientific farming methods. Small plots were believed to be less suitable for progressive farming methods. The cooperative would aggregate smallholdings into larger, more economically efficient units more suitable for modern agricultural methods and large-scale management (Schiller 1969: 45).

From the economist’s point of view there is also the other, and perhaps most crucial, side of agricultural development. The idea is that during the early stages of industrialization the agricultural sector must provide cheap labor and food to the industrial sector. This is not actually stated in the third Five Year Plan but Charkravarty (1987: 21) attributes it to the direct influence that visiting economists like P. A. Baran, Oskar Lange and Charles Bettleheim exerted on Nehru’s main architect, P. C. Mahalanobis, regarding methods of economic planning. In hindsight, the idealistic agricultural reform policy was perhaps over-optimistic of what village-based traditional agriculture could achieve given implementation difficulties, the vested interest of landlords, and deep seated Indian social stratification (Charkravarty 1987).

At the time of the first Five Year Plans (1950-1960) India’s approach to a population policy was remarkably optimistic, perhaps a reflection of the general technocratic belief in the methods of planned social development in this era. The vision driving India’s population policy is spelled out very clearly in a 1968 article by Chandra Shekar, an Indian demographer and economist who was elected to the Lok Sabha’s upper house in 1964 and appointed Minister of Health and Family Planning by Indira Gandhi in 1967. With the Indian population passing the 500 million mark in the early 1960s and experiencing an annual growth rate of 2.5 percent, Chandra Shekar called for an urgent “anti-natalist” policy targeting a 50 percent reduction of the birth rate by the mid 1970s (Chandra Shekar 1968: 643). The task was to convince married couples (numbering around 90 million at that time) of the need for small families (Chandra Shekar 1968: 643). In surveys like Mysore’s 1952 population study a majority of parents stated that they preferred three children (including two sons) but in practice families continued to be larger (Raina 1988: 21, 59, Guilmoto and Rajan 2005).

The anti-natalist policy was an extension of the state-sponsored family planning ideas spelled out in the first Five Year Plan: “The reduction of the birth rate to the extent necessary to stabilize the population at a level consistent with the requirements of the national economy” (First Five Year Plan cited in Ram 2004: 106, see also Raina 1988: 6). Initially, limiting the average family size was to be achieved by increasing birth spacing and practicing the rhythm method. Chandra Shekar advocated family planning messages, such as “displaying the happy faces of a four-person family with the slogan, “Two or three children – enough” (Chandra Shekar 1968: 644), disseminated through songs and motion pictures, billboards and radio.

When the third Five-Year Plan was laid out in 1961 it included birth control methods such as sterilization, IUCD (the loop), condoms and the pill (Chandra Shekar 1968: Ibid: 645). However, despite its explicitly stated relevance to India’s economic development, the enactment of the population policy was slow (Samuel 1966) and the programs did not really start to be implemented until the ambitious and often coercive national campaigns launched under Indira Gandhi’s government.

The blueprint of the family planning project was based on scientific research. An elaborate administrative structure with national policy targets was conceived, almost like a military campaign (see the organization charts in Raina 1988: 66-69, 76-83). Even though part of the explanation for the choice of strategy and organization probably lies with the government’s belief in centralized power and planning, another part probably lies in Nehru’s keen interest in the work of the British military strategist Liddell Hart (Gopal 1994 p 290) and the fact that the director of the family planning campaign was B.
L. Raina, a colonel recruited from the Indian Army Medical Corps.

In 1953, under the first Five Year Plan, a national Family Planning Research and Program Committee (FPRPC) was established followed by a Sub Committee for Demographic Studies and a Council for Population Studies in 1954. The objective was to carry out studies and produce statistics as basic data for the planning process. In 1956, under the second Five Year Plan, a Central Family Planning Board (CFPB) was formed and the Ministry of Health appointed a national director for family planning supported by state-level family planning officers (FPOs). In 1957 efforts were accelerated when the Minister of Health, the Gandhian Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur who had reservations about family planning methods, was replaced by the more progressive minded D. P. Karmakar. The national planners did not fully trust the capacity of the local Primary Health Centres and Maternity and Child Health Centres to carry out the implementation task and therefore established a separate network of Family Planning Teams. In 1958, 675 teams (452 of them rural) were operative across the nation.

During the following years State Family Planning Boards and District Family Planning Committees were formed and the small family policy was promoted through Village Leaders Orientation Camps. During the third Five Year Plan there was an attempt to introduce village-level family planning committees and in 1962 a number of Pilot Demonstration Districts were selected to serve as models for family planning education. At the same time the human genetics issue was rising on the population policy agenda, and the well-known British geneticist and socialist J. B. S. Haldane was appointed as head of the biometry unit at the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI).7

What is interesting is how changes in the family were being linked by the planners to the economic development of the nation. In the Five Year Plans the family is treated as a rational economic unit. The purpose of the population policy is to provide incentives to make it rational for families to limit their size in the economic interest of the state. Population control and family planning thereby emerged as important attributes in the image of the modern and progressive post-colonial Indian state. The challenge of the planners was to refashion India’s population to measure up to this image (Ram 2004: 82).

Just as the nation-state must embody universal rationality on behalf of the welfare of the nation, so the family members must come to take on the attributes of rationality in order to plan the welfare of the whole family (Ram 2004:106).

This planning philosophy takes for granted that there is a rational and general will of development shared between planners and the people of India; the epitome of the modern Indian citizen as he/she emerges in the Nehruvian vision of modern India and in the population policies of the first three Five Year Plans.

When discussions began about agricultural settlements as a solution for the Tibetan refugees in India, development towards socialism through industrialization and scientific agriculture was on the top of the Indian government’s agenda while birth control and family planning was on the rise. The planners wanted to accelerate the progression by raising the bar in the second Five Year Plan, and by promoting cooperative organization as a way to mobilize people to participate in the national economy and, in due time, embrace socialism.

REFUGEES IN THE HANDS OF INDIAN DEVELOPMENT

Although there was an increase in economic growth and India did fairly well up until the mid-1960s, observers generally attribute the limited success of India’s planned development to overambitious targets and failures in the implementation stage impeded by recalcitrant state governments (Herring 1999), corruption (Gopal 1984: 166), a stiffening bureaucracy, an inability to move reform projects beyond the paper stage, as well as events out of the government’s control. The ambitious Community Development Program launched in 1955 to transform the social and economic life of Indian villages lost its drive to become more of an “official organization” (Ibid: 167, Hegde 2000). To break this trend, Nehru tried to reactivate the panchayat raj as an alternative to government administration. But state governments remained passive to the initiative. This was also a time when communal conflicts and minority rifts imposed challenges to the development of the modern Indian nation-state.

Nevertheless it was in the context of these optimistic, ambitious and technocratic Indian development schemes inspired by socialism that the Tibetan refugees arrived in India around 1960 and the decision was made to construct agricultural settlements for them. When the refugees crossed the border to India many did so to escape China’s effort to transform Tibet’s economy and society. Ironically, Tibetans found themselves to be objects of the Nehruvian philosophy that shared many of its basic tenets with Maoism.

Compared to an Indian village community that was firmly embedded in the traditional system of social stratification and land ownership, the Tibetan refugee community was a much more malleable object of development. The refugee community was in a kind of liminal stage: free-floating, uprooted from their home, disaggregated and disorganized and not yet settled in India. Planners did not have to wait for people to adapt to the reform policies. There were no recalcitrant interests or political opposition making policy implementation difficult, and whatever objections the weak and powerless refugees might have had could easily be overcome. The visions and policies of planned social development embodied...
by the Five Year Plans that had encountered implementation obstacles in Indian society could be directly applied with little resistance (or so it was hoped) in the planning and establishment of Lukzung Samdrupling. The settlement could be constructed with a modern infrastructure and mechanized, scientific farming methods as a model for Indian rural development.

THE SMALL FAMILY PRINCIPLE

The refugees were settled as a community on their own demarcated land with their own administrative structure. Because of the ongoing Sino-Indian border conflict authorities felt need to control the settlement's activities and inhabitants so a dual administrative structure was established: the Indian side was headed by an officer from the Indian Administrative Service with the designation of Special Officer, while the Tibetan side was headed by a representative of the Dalai Lama’s nascent government in exile. Although the Tibetans were refugees fleeing from Tibet they were, in the eyes of the Indian government, in danger of being infiltrated by spies from China. Access to the settlement was therefore strictly limited and the refugees were not allowed to move outside without written permission from the Special Officer.

The most obvious element of Indian planning philosophy in the settlement was perhaps the physical design of the camps: it starts from the small family principle inherent in India’s population policy. Brick houses constructed for the refugees were built to accommodate small families, and as a consequence the refugees had to be re-organized into small households irrespective of the real family relationships among those living under a single roof.

A house included two rooms and an indoor toilet. Each house would, ideally, hold a father, a mother, and two to three children. The official version of the small family principle is that the average refugee family proved to be of that size (The Office of H. H. Dalai Lama 1969: 5). However, it does not appear very likely that the refugees left Tibet in small family units, especially since this was not the common type of family unit in the agro-pastoral communities traditionally found in Tibet. In fact, historical and demographic research shows that the typical rural household in pre-1959 Tibet consisted of up to 15 members representing three generations (Goldstein 1971; Childs 2003).

As the community was started fresh administrators could exercise a degree of control over the population through instruments like the camp registers where every member’s demographic data were recorded. The Representative’s office was obliged to monitor each refugee’s activities and movements, changes in the family such as births, deaths and marriages, and land allotment, and regularly submit reports to the Special Officer for inspection. These administrative duties amounted to a rather bombastic bureaucracy that required a lot of attention from the Indian and Tibetan administrators and engendered evasive strategies from the settlers. This is evidenced by the many short notes in the old files from the Indian Administration to the settlement office marked “urgent” and pointing out passed deadlines and demanding first priority (see Magnusson et al. 2009: 21).

In line with India’s national objective to control its population, there were attempts to introduce Tibetan refugees to family planning campaigns. In 1973 the Indian administration informed the Tibetan Representative that a “Vasectomy Camp” was to be held in the settlement to fulfill the targets.” It is unclear what became of that program. However, when a family planning unit asked to visit the settlement in 1976 the Representative cancelled the visit on the grounds that “the population of Tibetans in India is negligible compared to Tibetans still in Tibet where the Communist Chinese is trying to wipe out the very Tibetan race.” This is a clear example whereby the Tibetans own political and social agendas conflicted with the plans of developers to transform them into “rational” actors reproducing small families.

ALLOTMENT OF LAND AND LAND TENURE

The settlement of the Tibetan refugees mirrored the Nehruvian idea of development through industrialization and cooperative, scientific farming. The original settlement plans included both agricultural and small-scale industrial settlements in the form of handicraft production such as carpet weaving. The handicraft societies and multipurpose societies were started on the initiatives of Tibetan religious communities or communities originating in the same geographical place in Tibet, for instance, Iddgah, an industrial settlement of Tibetan Muslims established in Srinagar (Mandal 2001: 246). They were initially more successful than the big agricultural settlements (Gooch 1969: 200). In 1965 the Tibetan Industrial Rehabilitation Society (TIRS) was set up and initialized a woolen mill, tea estates and a craft community in Kangra, a limestone quarry in Kumrao, a hydrated lime plant in Sataun, and a fiber glass factory in Paonta supporting, in total, around a thousand households.

Although nothing is mentioned about the origin of the cooperative organization of agricultural settlements in official accounts such as the Office of H. H. Dalai Lama’s (1969) re-

port on the first ten years of rehabilitation in India, it seems likely that it was a part of the settlement plan to foster the community towards a socialist attitude to life through the co-operative model in the way Nehru had visualized it. Specifically, even though the Tibetan Cooperative Society (TCS) in Lukzung Samdrupling was not registered under the Mysore State Cooperative Act until 1964, the agriculture work in the settlement functioned as a co-operative from the beginning. Considering the important part played by the co-operative ideal in Indian planned development, it is probable that the initiative came from the Indian advisors rather than from the settlers themselves. The Cooperative Society carried out the settlement's trading activities, and was funded by loans and donations as no fees were collected from the members. After some time the Cooperative Society expanded its activities to animal husbandry, a poultry farm, a local transport service, and a flourmill. In 1970 the society took over responsibility for a workshop started by Swiss Tech and was one of the biggest in the Mysore area. In addition to its workshop services, it also provided employees with housing and dining facilities. In the same year a tractor section with 17 tractors and 28 drivers was branched off into a separate enterprise and in 1975 it took up local dealership for an Indian Oil service station. In practice, during the first years while the land was still being reclaimed, the settlers were forced to collectively cultivate whatever land was available at a daily wage of two rupees and rely on free additional provisions from the government and donor organizations.

Even though the household was intended to farm its own patch of land, the leasing system was designed so that if a refugee left the settlement for good or died, the land was returned to the state government and redistributed by the Indian Special Officer. In that sense, it was a communal or perhaps even collective land tenure plan where leased tenure was combined with government ownership. Government ownership was further reinforced in that the refugees did not actually have to pay for the lease. In the beginning this system seems to have hampered the initiative of the settler to work the land although later, when the government started to charge land revenue tax, they seem to have regained it (Office of H. H. Dalai Lama 1969: 4).

Resistance to the goal of communal land tenure is evident in the norms of inheritance that developed in opposition to the original settlement plans. At the death of a settler the land was to be returned to the Indian government for redistribution, but in reality the land was passed on to kin under the discretion of the Representative’s office. The issue was frequently raised by the Indian Special Officer and in the Camp registers there are actually a number of entries specifying that a deceased person’s land went to a son or daughter, sometimes one living in a separate household. The Indian administrators’ cognizance of this practice is reflected in complaints about “unauthorized cultivation”, and, sometimes, direct references as in a letter to the Tibetan Representative:

> It may also please be noted that the Representative has no authority to allot land to whomsoever he likes. When once the settler leaves the Settlement permanently the land given on lease basis becomes the property of Government.

The refugees also adapted to the situation by forming unofficial economic alliances in farming based on extended family bonds (Magnusson et al 2009).

**MODERNIZATION AND AGRICULTURAL MECHANIZATION**

The first years of farming in the settlement were difficult

12. With limited land access as the clearing of forest continued, many of the original 666 settlers had to wait to get their acre of land. In the meantime they cultivated 28 acres as a co-operative. The produce was collected by the Indian Special Officer and distributed to the families. In 1963 an additional 483 acres were allotted and by 1967 almost all of the 3,000 acres were under cultivation (The Office of H. H. Dalai Lama 1969: 9, 1981: 103).


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and marked by a lack of resources. There was not yet enough land cleared for every settler to receive one acre. Water was in shortage, and crops failed due to unsuitable farming methods and crop choices. Agricultural production was not enough to meet the subsistence needs of the refugees, pressing the Indian government and donor organizations to continue providing free supplementary rations. To exacerbate matters, a severe water shortage in 1963 led to an even smaller harvest. In response, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs decided to bring in the expertise of Swiss Technical Cooperation (Swiss Tech) to revamp the development in the settlement (Office of H. H. Dalai Lama 1969: 11).

Swiss Tech is without doubt the foreign donor organization that came to have the greatest impact on the development of Lukzung Samdrupling. When the Swiss experts arrived in Bylakuppe in 1964/65, they immediately proceeded to fit the settlement with modern technology. Two bulldozers were put to work between 1965 – 1966 to clear the rest of the forest for farming and a planned dairy farm, adding an additional 3,427 productive acres to the settlement, of which 3,340 acres were contoured to be better suited for agriculture. In addition, a number of bore wells and five dams with an irrigation capacity of 40-50 acres were constructed. The initial settlement crop of cotton, tobacco, dry paddy and ragi that proved to be a failure was largely replaced by hybrid maize.

To further develop the settlement’s agriculture, Swiss Tech had soil samples of every field analyzed in order to achieve an exact scientific match between soil, crop, fertilizer and pesticides. Fields were set aside for various experiments and a comparative study was made of tractor versus bullock ploughed fields proving that tractor ploughed fields were likely to produce a fourfold increase in yields:

The explanation is simple – better and deeper bed seeds, permitting better moisture absorption, longer conservation of moisture, better nitification over a longer period, all resulting in better, easier and deeper root development, with consequently higher yields.

In fact, Pat Brewster, an agricultural and industrial expert working for the foreign organization Committee on Relief and Gift Supplies in New Delhi, rules out the use of bullocks solely on the grounds that the settlement would need 1,200 of them to plough the land, while there would be no facilities to keep and graze such a large number of animals. Even if bullocks were used they would plow too slowly and inefficiently for modern farming. All factors considered, Brewster considered that the cost of keeping bullocks would actually exceed the cost of a sufficient number of tractors and a tractor workshop. What is also interesting is Brewster’s argument that the Tibetan refugees, lacking experience with bullock aided farming, are more open to mechanization than Indian farmers. If they were to learn from scratch how to farm in South India they could just as well learn to farm with tractors. Although Brewster conceded that mechanization would possibly lead to the resentment and envy of the Indian farmers, it would serve as a model for modern agriculture that would eventually disseminate to Indian farms as well. The mechanization of the settlement’s agriculture was intimately linked by Brewster to the big picture: the economic development of India and the need to feed a fast growing population:

We must think of the future […] of the whole nation, instead of pinning a vital decision to the basis of some conjecture, that some of the surrounding Indian farmers object to mechanization at Bylakuppe.

In addition to the mechanization and employment of scientific agricultural methods, the settlement constructed an infrastructure of roads, water, and sewer lines, and in 1966 the Tibetan Co-operative Society placed an order to Mysore State Electricity Board for an electrical power supply to the settlement. The grid included power for pumps and mills and the workshop as well as for street and house lights (fitted at the cost of Rs. 56 per house by St. Mary’s Electicals in Kushalnagar). On August 14, 1968, the work was completed and the power switched on. However, two months later almost all the lights were out and transmission lines were frequently damaged by Tibetan “cow boys throwing green creepers” at them.

As was the case with the power grid, the construction of a water supply was penned and pushed by the Swiss advisors. They were in a hurry to develop the settlement and complained about the “Tibetan lack of experience and slow tempo.” The Tibetans, politely appreciating the good intentions of Swiss Tech, did try to slow down the pace of development and actually turned down a large-scale plan for sprinkler irrigation that included lifting water from the nearby Cauvery River and pumping it through a tunnel.
That the Swiss advisors did not fully understand what could perhaps be thought of as cultural differences between themselves and the Tibetans is illustrated in a complaint letter from the Tibetan representative to Swiss Tech’s Director:

I’m sure that [he] is not doing all these [sic] with any bad intentions, but the way he tackles problems are somewhat impractical. He does not seem to realize that he is dealing with a group of people highly illiterate and underdeveloped. He cannot expect everybody to function the same capacity as himself […] Sometimes he is like a whirlwind passing through a paper mill.  

Judging by the documents in the old files, Swiss Tech’s introduction of modern, scientific technology was not totally in synchronization with the Tibetans’ capacity to maintain and manage it. Although efficient in theory, the “high-tech” systems were sensitive and vulnerable, and required a trained staff as well as reliable access to spare parts. The documents speak of continuous problems and failures. This, combined with poor construction and installation work, made the modern technology hard to sustain. For instance, by the time Swiss Tech was ready to hand over the management of the water supply to the Tibetans in 1971 they had to attach a list of 53 unattended complaints.  

CONCLUSION

When the Tibetan refugees crossed the border to India many of them did so to escape the Chinese led modern development in Tibet. Ironically, they found themselves to be objects of the Nehruvian philosophy of Indian development that shared many of its basic tenets with Maoist development philosophy. In a broad, comparative perspective there are many similarities between Mao’s and Nehru’s development philosophies and how a planned economy along with birth control is seen as the key to national development.

Arriving in India the refugees became objects of a planned development linked to the national economy in the form of agricultural settlements based on cooperative organization, scientific farming, and small families. The leading ideas of Nehruvian development philosophy were implemented in Lukzung Samdrupling with the help of Swiss experts and Indian administrators making the settlement a model for modernization and development. But as the documents in the old settlement files testify, the refugees were not altogether cooperative and in many cases pursued strategies of resistance. Various documents in the old files describe the refugees as unwilling and in many cases pursued strategies of resistance. Various documents in the old files describe the refugees as unwilling and in many cases pursued strategies of resistance.

I write to you to request that the Tibetan Representative are not furnishing the list properly regarding the death birth and temporary settlers. It is very difficult to even submit monthly statement to my official superior. About 5 to 6 times I inspected the Settlement Representatives, to furnish regarding the death and birth, but they did not submit the same. Now, I request to you sir, please issue instructions to the Representatives to submit the list of Tibetans Old & New Settlement [Lukzung Samdrupling and Dickey Larsoe, both in Bylakuppe] as House-wise and camp-wise at present those who residing in the Bylakuppe and issue instructions to Representatives to send the list of birth and death in every fortnightly. Please treat this as an urgent and action taken line of reply may kindly be communicated and to submit compliance report to my official superior.  

Looking more closely at India’s development philosophy provides a context to better understand the design and purpose of Lukzung Samdrupling and how it was not merely a scheme for the rehabilitation of Tibetan refugees. In a situation where the principles of Nehruvianism proved to be hard to realize in many parts of India, the settlement of the refugees became a method of its implementation, showing the benefits of modern life to people in the surrounding area and bringing development to underdeveloped regions of the country.

REFERENCES


**DATA SOURCES**

Camp Register, Camp 1, Lugs zung bsam grub gling.