Chapter 5

TIBETAN CULTURE IN DELHI

1. MEANING OF CULTURE

The term culture is rooted in Latin’s word ‘Colo, ere’, it means to cultivate. It has been defined as the way of life for an entire society such as codes of manners, dress, language, rituals, food, art, marriage and festivals etc. The concept of culture and its role in society has been relocated by various scholars such as B. Taylor, Radcliffe-Brown, Gramsci, Edward Said etc. The scholarly works has given culture a separate status as area of study. Due to these reasons, cultural studies has emerged one of the most important of branch of Epistemology.

Radcliffe-Brown has studied culture as an internal component of social structure. In contrast Taylor defines culture, “Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, murals, law, custom and any other. Capabilities or habits acquired by man as a member of societies.”¹

On the other hand, Radcliffe Brown argues, “Each structural system is a functional unity in which all the component parts contribute in a harmonious ways to its existence and continuity. To test this hypothesis all kinds of social

phenomenon, morals, law, etiquette, religion, government, Economics, Education, language need to be studied not as abstraction or isolation but in their direct and indirect relations to social structure, i.e. with reference to the way in which they depend upon or effect the social relations b/w persons and groups of persons.”

The role of culture has assumed quite important role in the contemporary period due to Diaspora. Further, the concept of multiculturalism has assumed greater significance in the academic circles Prof. Intiaz Ahmad says, “Multiculturalism is concerned with the issue of mutual inter relations among the shorts of plurality, which might be found to exist in society. It is concerned with the issue of equality. It asks, whether the different pluralities co-exist as equals in the public and political arena.”

The term Tibetan culture covers a vast canvas reflecting ways of life evolved in Tibet. Tibet has a unique geographical feature making it ‘land of snow’ and Tibetan society as a nomadic society. Tom Grunfeld states, “On the face of it this cloud of mystery is not surprising. Because of its geographical isolation, total lack of roads and modern communication networks. Tibet escaped for the most part the great advances of western imperialism during 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. A European travelers, missionaries, merchants and

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2 Ibid, P. 530.
military forces were combining the world, Tibet remain impenetrable; aloof, separate and unmolested.\(^4\)

The plantation of Buddhism reshaped and re-colored the Tibetan way of life from outside. Buddhist culture was accommodated within structure of Tibetan life. In totality, the term Tibetan culture represents the life style, evolved from nomadic, pastoral to Buddhist practices.

Tibetan culture includes various components such as art, clothing, food, calendar, rugs, architecture, music, drama, festivals etc. These components have been formulated in Tibet’s geo-climatic conditions.

2. **TIBETAN ART**

Tibet Art has been rooted in geographic and Buddhist practices, it can be located in Tibet from statues, mani to wooden carvings and designers of Thanka paintings. It is an essential component of Tibetan Buddhist culture and religious practices. The tradition of Thanka paintings is considered very important element of art, the iconic depictions for the visualization of God.

The architecture of Tibet contains elements of Chinese, Indian and Buddhist traditions. Prof. Norbu says, “We lived in a five room, Single story house in the village of Tashigang, five miles outside the town of sakya. To which we were soon to move. The house was simple and strongly built in marked contrast to the complex monastic architecture. It has a broad stone base

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about three feet high and about six feet of walling made of mud bricks cemented by low dung and straw: The main room has only three windows - - - their was low chimney a massive door always open to man and animals. The most expensive part of the house was the ceiling, made of wood transported from the foothills of distinct Himalayas. It consisted of a large log right across the house, supported by a central pillar.°°

The Tibetan government in exile has established Tibetan Architecture center aimed preserving and disseminating information about Tibetan architecture. This issue has become important as it is reported that over, six thousand Tibetan monuments and buildings have been demolished in post 1959 Tibet. Architecture of Tibet reflects central themes of Tibetan religious beliefs, social and political ethos, technology inter and intra cultural relations. The structure of building examples and reinforces the structure of culture in a three dimensional format.

The following photographs shows development of different trajectories in the field of architecture.

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Photo: Tibetans in Yellapur, Karnataka (source: field survey)

Photo: Tibetan market in Mundgod (Karnataka) Source: field survey
In post 1959, Tibet the government of China has taken a number of measures to plant modern/Chinese forms of architecture. In views of Karan, “In 1959, the Dalai Lama reported that the Chinese had destroyed nearly 1000 monasteries in eastern Tibet. Chinese’s attack on the Potala Palace and the nearby monasteries of Sera, Dripung and Ganden during the Lahsa Uprising led to the destruction of valuable sacred books and records, statues and paintings, and death of many Lamas and monks - - - Currently the Dripung Monastery is maintained as a showcase exhibit for foreign dignitaries visiting from Eastern Europe and other communist countries.”

Sandpaintings are also famous for religious and healing purposes. Tibetan Buddhist sand paintings are usually made up of mandalas. The sand is

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carefully placed on a large flat table and the process takes many days. The Mandala is broken after the competition of painting.

The mandala sand paintings begin with a ceremony opened by Lamas or Tibetan priests involves calling the forces of goodness by means of chanting, music and mantra. The Lamas begin by drawing an outline of Mandala to be painted on a wooden platform after this the sound is colored from traditional metal funnels called chalk-pur. The sand paintings concise pictures such as matrix shops and ancient spiritual symbols; aimed for reconstructing the earth and its inhabitant.

Apart from sand paintings, Thangka paintings are also famous in Tibet. A Thangka represents a painted or embroidered Tibetan banner for various purposes to Lama in a monastery, family alter and in Lama ceremonial processions.

The term Thanka is a combination of two words, ‘Than’ and ‘Ka’ than means flat, ‘ka’ means painting. It is also called scroll painting. The Thankas can be divided into five categories on these groups:-

- Colours in the background
- Gold background
- Red Background
- Black background
- Printed background
Delhi has long history of art, particularly from the period of Delhi Sultanate onwards. The establishment of Delhi sultanate and Mughal Empire planted Persian art in Medieval India. “The Turkish being who followed one another in quick succession on the thrones of Delhi and north eastern and central India, as well as the Deccan, were inveterate builders. They erected splendid victory-Towers impregnable force, luxurious palaces, mosques and mausoleums. Many great monuments came into being during their regimes both at Delhi and their Provincial capitals of Ajmer, Johnpur, Gujarat, Malnes Bengal, Gulberg, Bijapur and Sindh.”

Further, the Mughal empire established the most powerful state in medieval India and was legitimized in various part of the empire. The Mughal Empire set precedent both in architecture and painting for example Fatehpur Sikri, Taj Mahal, Redfort in Delhi etc. reflects the centrality of Delhi: It means Delhi has functioned as the epicenter of Indian art.

The plantation of Tibetans in Delhi created crises in sustaining and reproducing Tibetan as, first of all, for the last years they have remained refugee. The geographical and industrial conditions of Delhi have forced them to get accommodated within Delhi’s art. The art of Delhi has been constructed in the times of modern period.

The modern architecture has grown up due to efforts of Indian and Britishers. In Delhi, there is a clear distinction between areas where indigenous

7 The Gazetteer of India, Vol. 2 Ministry and culture, (New Delhi; Ministry of Information and Broadcasting- Publication Division, 1997), P. 572.
influences are upper most and areas characterized by colonial and modernizing influences. There is perhaps no city in Delhi for its monuments. The Tibetans were provided brick made houses in the Majnu-Ka-Tilla. It was very difficult for them to construct architecture on the lineage of Tibet. During post-1990 period, Tibetan settlement has witnessed construction of decorative-housed restaurants and hotels. The pattern if architecture in these buildings is same as that of Delhi.

Initially, the poor economic conditions of Tibetans forced of them to neglect paintings such as Thangpa and sand paintings. These paintings were also neglected in the absence of market for these commodities in Delhi. The Tibetan market at Janpath is now a hub for the purchase of these Tibetan artifacts. In the case of Dharmshala (Himachal) and Karanataka where Tibetans resides as refugees is slightly different due to number and compact structure of settlement and agrarian economy in that population. Thus, the Tibetan paintings are surviving along with religious architecture in Dharamsala and Mundgod for cultural multiplication as well as reproduction. It becomes very clear from the local pattern of art practiced in residential areas of Tibetans.

3. **TIBETAN CLOTHING**

The pattern of clothing in Tibet and Diaspora shows great discontinuity with regional changes. The traditional Tibetan clothes made up of sheep skin or wool. It is primarily home made by men.
A sheep skin will be sun baked and then cleaned, further it will be soaked for a few days in the liquid of milk after butter is extracted. After this process, it is ready for tailoring. Tibetan clothing is primarily consisted of Tibetan robe and shirt. The robe is broad, and appears longer to the left compared to thee right scale, and it is after fastened under the right armpit. The local herdsmen wear a furred robe. In the daytime, the people wear left sleeve only or sometimes wear neither and tying two sleeves at the waster. Tibetan farmers living on warm and wet climatic of southern Tibet and came clothes from tweed, a kind of hand wove cloth. The Tibetan robes exceed wear’s height and when worn the waist is lifted and fastened with a belt.

The robe produces two large pockets, one in front and another at the back, or people. The fabric of cloth reflects hierarchy for a good cloth; the collar and hem are made of special material. In the case of man, the collar is sometimes made up of Leopard skin; the collar of women is made of red clothes or several strips of bright colours clothes. Belt is required to tie up Tibetan dress. It is generally put around the waist twice and then, it is tied behind with knot. The knot has ceremonial significance as it s untied during the occasion of death of relatives.

Hat is also an important component of Tibetan clothing. The texture of had changes according to seasons such as woolen hat in summer, felt hat in spring, fox-belt hat in winter season etc. The hat also has social significance as rich and poor wear hats of different colours and materials for example the noble woman wear Bazhug decelerated with further the colour of hot has
greater significance in the context of religion as different sects of Buddhism use the colour of hat for differentiation. In the case of Gelugpa sect, the color of hat is yellow.

Another distinct feature of Tibetan clothing is boot. The Tibetans use different styles and qualities of boots such as Sonba, Vilauad Duzoha. The shoes are open from rear and tied from rear. The material for shoes is comes from OX skin and pulu.

The Diasporic cloth pattern has undergone sharp transformation according to time and space as hot climate makes it very difficult for the Tibetans to wear woolen made clothes. In the initial period of transplantation, a lot of Tibetans died due to inability of adjusting in the hot climate. Marcello informs, “The Tibetans could not adjust to the climate where as Massuri, at 6,000 feet, had a tale tolerable cold climate, both refugee campuses were at lower elevation and the heat mass unbearable for Tibetans/ who were used to amid the Himalayas. The high temperature not only killed them but also made ill. It was due to weak immune system as viruses expire at high altitudes. The Tibetans were never exposed to them. In the lowered sighted Indian camps viruses flourished and many Tibetans, with no immunities to disease, died.”

Madhu Tankha expresses, “Whenever you like visiting the Tibetan market, do not have any preconceived notion that imported, smuggled goods will greet you. The Market situated at the age old Inter state Bus Terminal near

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Manu-Ka-Tilla, offers some of the most affordable clothes this side of Yamuna. Initially, the Tibetan market started selling Tibetan food items like Thukpa Momos, and mouth watering chowmein that was some years ago. Due to availability of shops at cheap rents the garment selling started mushrooming. After the assassination of Nepalese King --- Smuggled from south East Asian countries --- have come to grinding halt. Now the market is flooded with Indigenous goods which travel from Ludhiyana, the Manchester of India and ‘Bangalore’.

Initially, the Tibetans of Delhi tried to replicate Tibetan pattern of clothing by changing from woolen to cotton clothes. The style of clothing remained same due to various reasons such as to maintain diasporic identity and job opportunities among the Tibetans etc.

The most powerful symbols of Tibetan dressing were molded. The monks carried on the pattern of clothing prescribed by respective sects. Over a period of time the Tibetan mode of clothing and industry based occupations created contradictions. The Tibetans had followed various types of occupations such as chang selling, cosmetic and garment selling, restaurants, guest houses and daily wage labourers etc.

The majority of Tibetans were deprived of basic opportunities for the development of human beings. The Tibetans were not-habitual to the monetary based economy. Prof. Dawa Norbu states,“What struck almost in India was the

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monetary economy- the terrible value of money. Everyday mother would exclaim: 'Oh! God our rice (or some other commodities, is finished' in the old Tibetan average family such as ours faced at most two food crises a year. We stored enough provisions for the whole year, and we were not worried every week as where our next meal would come from. Now we had to buy our necessities weekly, if not daily. Another discovery we made was that in modern society if we did not have work for one week, we were sure to go hungry for the following week. In traditional Tibet, the people worked leisurely through the farming season, producing the farming season, producing all they needed and for the rest of the year they relaxed at home. In Darjeeling, since we had no income, we finished the money we had from the sell of my mother's jewels very quickly.\textsuperscript{10}

Over a period of time, Tibetans have established an independent economic network on the basis of chaang selling restaurant etc... Due to this reason, the Tibetans in Delhi have adopted clothing pattern of Delhi. It becomes very evident from the following photos of the Dawa T. Norbu:--

This pattern of clothing at the school level has given freedom to adopt 'local style. In the post-school education, the students have been free wear anything but a traditional dress may incur permanent interference to senior members in life. Hence, The Tibetan students wear industry based clothing pattern, i.e. paint, shirt, skirts, sall, salwar, kurta etc.

The period of post 1990s have started new trends of clothing in all over world. As the world has become global, hence, clothing has been affected. Further, the post-1990 period has also seen the emergence of young breed of Tibetans as a constituency of clothing. The Tibetan youth can be located to wear all types of available global clothing. The clothing pattern is also emerged as a reflection of social stratification. The poor Tibetans continuously wear
Delhi based clothing but the powerful Tibetans youth offer all types of clothes available in the shops. These include jeans, T-Shirts, belts, Shoes etc.

The period of pre-1990 had witnessed a continuous tension in the Tibetans in exile for prescribing Tibetan clothing pattern and adjusting with new climate. Thus, the older generation of Tibetans people started wearing cotton/Terricot based cloths in the home settlement. They were the transmitter of Tibetan culture in Diaspora. Further, the pattern of clothing underwent transformation as the community had allowed the educational system to follow locals.

4. Tibetan Food:

The Tibetan food has been one of the most powerful components of Tibetan culture. The variety of food reflects the taste of land of snows. The most common dishes of Tibetan food are tsampa, momo, stir fried meat, thukpa, carrot cake, banana porridge, soja etc. is also very much evident by these photo’s given below:

Photo: The Hindu, Thursday, Dec 16, 2004
The Hindu, Monday, April 28, 2003

Photo: Central Tibetan School Administration

Photo: Tibetan Momo
The evolution of food is primarily limited and shaped by the geography and availability of raw materials, such as cold weather and oxygen source. In the past, the food habit was a way of life due to limitations on natural resources and backward economic development. In Tibet, the contemporary period has seen the commercialization of Tibetan Food. Menon says, “The Tibetan Food at Elgin Road, they proclaim, is the most authentic in the country. Not without reason, too, since the Momo and thukpa joints have around Kolkata since infamous Chinese land grab. Delhi too, has its Tibetan spots. But, Mumbai, all along had been handicapped by geography - - - Tibet for karma Lama, its forty-something India-born owner, is nothing but a feeding memory. The former television production controller decided on eatery, after being invited by repeated dinner requests from trends- - - A culinary compares passed down on the generational raft ensures that momos are steamed just right- softish, with sauces made from Himalayan red chillies, very polishable. A far cry from the
dumplings, which masquerade as momos in most Mumbai restaurants. The same goes for the Thukpa, which is almost as the one you get in Little Tibet across the country- though the spice levels it appears to be on the higher side."

The process of commercialization of Tibetan Food has led to opening of restaurants in the Majnu-Ka-Tilla, to general public. “The little nugget of information is provided by Sunrita Lama, an artist by training, who has recently opened Zakhang, a restaurant that specializes in Tibetan food at Hauz Khas Village in South Delhi. Sunrita’s connection with Tibet and its people began over two decades ago when she met her husband, Dmigs Med Rdorje lama, who runs his own business but at present is standing by her in running Zakhang, which incidentally is the Tibetan term for ‘eating place’. The connection however is deeper even than food or family, as Sunrita is also trained in Thangkha painting, the beautiful religious art form of Tibet that she learnt from the Thangkha artist Ngawang Choephel in Dharmashala, with constant guidance from her father-in-law, a renowned spiritual teacher, the late De. Chhimed Rigdzin Lama. In a room adjacent to the restaurant, she has opened a small gallery where her Thangkas are exhibited for sale along with Tibetan incense and greeting cards designed by her. She plans to extend the variety to other objects of decorative or symbolic value associated with Tibetan culture.”

11 Murali, K Menon, Tibetan Food Plants its Flag’s in Mumbai’s Culinary Map, Indian Express, March 10, 2004.
The Tibetans have not only established restaurants on various parts of India. Some of them keep shifting restaurant according to seasons. In this context, the case Kochi is remarkably described by Priyadarshini Sharma. "Along with her sister, Perna Tsomo a student of library Science at Wadia College, Pune, the two are here to try out Kochi as a business destination. We heard that there is a good flow of tourists to Kochi this time of the year and as Goa has a lot of competition we wanted to move to a new place. And, it has been right for the ladies who began by setting up a handicrafts shop and later sensing the potential of an eatery, opened Tastes of Tibet on December 10. You know the date is very important to us as it is the day that Dalai Lama won the Nobel Peace prize and it is also Human Right's Day, said Pema who came to Kochi earlier this year in connection with a planned demonstration and hunger strike against the impending execution of social activist and freedom fighter Tenzin Delek Rinpoche. It was then that she met her local partner in business, C.M. Philip. Along with him the two set up the restaurant." Further, the Tibetan food has firmly established in competition with manglorian cuisine.

Similarly, The Lobsang's Restaurant is located in downtown New Delhi. The front gate, taking the shape of an arch, is cast in iron inlaid with antique pattern. It is a three story building. The first floor offers Indian food, the second floor Chinese food.

The main items included in Tibetan food are Noodles, Dumplings, Butter Tea, Tibetan Bread, Tsam pa, Yak Butter, Milk product Qiangmudes

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12 Priyadarshini Sharma, "Hello, Tibetan Cusine", Metro plus, The Hindu, Thursday, Dec 16, 2004
Tea. Momo is a very hot variety of Tibetan food. It is made by dough and filling (Meat or Veg.) It can be given round or half moon shape. The momos are then placed in a large steamer. The surface of the steamer is oiled so that they will not stick to the metal. Tibetan butter is known as Docha. In Tibet, people drink it all long day as it heats them up. In Tibet, the process of making butter tea takes a long time and is pretty complicated. The people use a special back tea that comes from an area called Pemagul on Tibet. Four main things are needed to make Tea; plain black tea, sweet, butter, Milk.

Tsampa is kind of dough made with roasted floor and yak butter with water and beer. It has a certain novelty the first time Highland safely also called barley, is the principal material used to make Tsampa. Then, thukpa is a Tibetan noodle soup. It keeps the nomads warm during the winter season.

The same items are famous in various parts of the country. Priyadarshani Sharma says regarding Kochi “Ruchotse or momos in soup and Chowmein are other facility dishes on the Menu. The main difference in the momos that we make is that the filling is encased along with some soup. The special beverages served are Tibetan butter tea.”

5. Tibetan Music:

The Tibetan Music represents a great cultural heritage of Tibet. The Tibetan Music originated in the nomadic-pastoral methods of living. The

plantation of religious practices later adjusted the Tibetan Music. The Tibetan Music reflects Folk Music of Himalayan region. The nature of music is quite different after 1959 migration. The Diaspora is adjusting the Tibetan Music according to time and space available in home and host country.

“Tibetan religious music is the only Central Asian repertoire that has a long history of written notation. This notation, for liturgical chant, consists of numbers – i.e., symbols representing melodic contour rather than precise pitch, similar to the earliest music writing of medieval Europe. Also, distinctive is the metaphysical aspect of Tibetan Buddhist music, related to Indian philosophy. Each instrument of the monastery orchestra, as well as the drawn-out tones of chant, is believed to represent an externalized form of the mantras, or sounds inherent in the human body, accessible otherwise only through steadfast meditation. For the monks, such music is a basic aid to devotion and prayer. Musical styles vary somewhat among the sects of Tibetan Buddhism, but the basic approach and instruments are the same.”

Further, “The monastery instrument typifies the crossroad position of Tibet. Some, such as the large cymbals, stem from China, while other (the majority), such as the conch-shell trumpet and handballs, can be traced to Indian influence and are found as instruments of Buddhist worship as far away as Japan. Still, other instruments, such as the large oboe and the 10-foot metal trumpet, are perhaps Middle Eastern in origin. One wind instrument, the short trumpet made from a human leg bone, seems to be of purely local invention. Similarly, the structure of the music seems basically Tibetan. It is founded on a
principle of greatly prolonged dense, deep sounds, such as unison long and short trumpets with oboe, or the seemingly endless bass chant of groups of monks, whose long, drawn-out notes are punctuated by sharp, extended bursts or percussion. Each monk is said to be able to sing two or even three notes simultaneously.”¹⁴

The Tibetan Music primarily involves chanting. The chanting differs in different sects of Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, the style and instruments are determined by different school of Tibetan Buddhism such as:

- Gerlugpa - Classical music
- Nyingmapa - Romantic Music
- Sakyapa
- Kagupa

The Tibetan music in Diaspora has attained new heights. The secularization of music has created wider space for audiences. The styles are Ilhamo, toshe, Nangma etc.

In the contemporary period, Tibetan pop music is becoming famous in various parts of the world. This has been led by young generation of Tibetan Diaspora who has grown up in various parts of the world. Pop Music is an important genre of popular music it is also described as music produced

¹⁴ Tibetan Music, www.britannia.com
Tibetan pope music is also becoming most-popular. In this context the songs of Han-Hong are the most demanding item of music in China and other parts of world. Han-Hong is a Tibetan born young song writer and has attained success for being a versatile female musician who not only sings but is also a song writer. Her song ‘Brilliant rays on a snows landscape’ conveys the vastness and beauty of Tibet. It has throne light on the unique culture of Tibet and draws lot of interest. The song has garnered more than 20 awards in China.

Tsering Gurmay is another famous pop singer and he is popularly known as Tibetan king of Pop. He performed in the concert organised to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the radio voice of Tibet.
The Dalai Lama established TIPA i.e. Tibetan Institute of Performing Art, to promote the art of Tibet and to preserve cultural Identity of Tibetans. This step was taken to institutionalize Tibetan talent in Diaspora. TIPA is divided into several departments such as cultural school, Artistic, instructor, Teacher Trainers, Administration, and Research, Craft catering and retired staff. The well defined administration has 18 Trainees in TIPA and eleven instructors.

Photo: Students performing at TIPA
Photo: Students performing at TIPA

Photo: Tsering Gurmay (Tibetan King of Pop), TIPA
The culture of Tibetan Diaspora in Delhi has been determined on the one side by local social forces on the other hand institutionalized structure of Diasporas. The geographic-socio conditions of Delhi have already restricted continuity in certain cultural traditions such as clothing, architecture, sand painting etc. But, the acceptance of certain cultural traditions such as food, music etc has provided a new space for maintaining and re-producing cultural and economic resources.