INTRODUCTION

Tibet, popularly called 'roof of the world', is an ancient land of an ancient people. For centuries Tibet has fascinated mankind. Its inaccessibility has appealed to explorers, while scholars have been involved in the nature of Tibetan religion and its culture. In the last century considerable interest has been evoked in the political aspects of Tibet.

Tibet lies at the center of Asia, with an area of 2.5 million square kilometers. The country under Tibetan rule extended approximately from the 78th to the 103rd degree of east longitude and from the 27th to the 37th degree of north latitude. Tibet is a vast plateau, the average elevation above sea level being about 13,000 feet. It is surrounded by large mountain ranges and on the north lies an impassable desert. The presence of Himalayas along the entire southern frontier has made Tibet a dry land as rain clouds are arrested by mountain ranges. Many great rivers of Asia— the Indus of India and Pakistan, Irrawadi and Salween of Mayanmar and the Yangtse and Huangho of China originate in the Tibetan plateau.

The earth’s highest mountains, a vast arid plateau and great river valleys make up the physical homeland of 6 million Tibetans. Out of this more than two million Tibetans live in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). About 125,000 Tibetans refugees and their descendents live in India and Nepal, and a few thousand others are scattered in other countries. There are about a

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thousand in the United States.\textsuperscript{2} Ethnologists have observed two principal strains in the Tibetan populations—one tall, long-headed and long limbed, the other shorter in stature with high cheekbones, flat noses and round heads.\textsuperscript{3} Tibetan language is Tibeto-Burman in character. People of Tibetan origin spilled over to the Himalayas into Laddakh, Sikkim and Bhutan and thus ethnographic Tibet was larger than the political Tibet.

Tibet is comprised of the three provinces of Amdo (now split by China into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu & Sichuan), Kham (largely incorporated into the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan and Qinghai), and U-Tsang (which, together with western Kham, is today referred to by China as the Tibet Autonomous Region). The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) comprises less than half of historic Tibet and was created by China in 1965 for administrative reasons. It is important to note that when Chinese officials and publications use the term "Tibet" they mean only the TAR. Tibetans use the term Tibet to mean the three provinces described above, i.e., the area traditionally known as Tibet before the 1949-50 invasion.

Tibetan society was a stratified one where nobles played vital role. Apart from nobles this section of society consisted of small landed proprietors, rich farmers, merchants, small traders and herdsmen; next came the people engaged in minor occupations—tailors, carpenters; and lastly smiths, tinkers.

\textsuperscript{2} 'US Policy Toward Tibet' Testimony by Jeffrey Bader, Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington DC, May 13, 1997.

and butchers. Apparently there was no middle class. The two types of economically productive landholdings in Tibet were manorial estates held by lay aristocrats, monasteries, and incarnate lamas, and land directly held by the government. The majority of the country’s land and people were organized into manorial estates. Manorial estates were hereditary and main source of wealth. Serfdom was the foundation of the manorial estate system and for the political and monastic system. Though there was no caste system stratification was very much real in the Tibetan Society.

Monasticism is fundamental to Tibetan Buddhist society. Tibetan monastic system adhered to a mass monk ideology, supporting a staggering number of monks. An overwhelming majority of monks were placed in monasteries by their parents at an early age. Sera, Drepung and Ganden were three major Gelukpa monasteries. In the monastic organization the Dalai Lama held the highest position. The monasteries had well-organized administrative bodies to manage internal administration. They had several sources of income, the most important being the landed estates.

Main characteristics of the government under Tibetan rule were following. The government was a creature of tradition. It emerged from the lives of the people. Religion and politics, the two pillars of the government, characterized the body politic of Tibet. The government expressed chosi nyitrel, which

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4 Bina Roy Burman, Religion and Politics in Tibet, (New Delhi, Vikas, 1979), p.25
6 Ram Rahul, n.l, p. 62
translates as "religion and political affairs joined together". The government was administered by lay and monk officials. Lay officials were normally recruited from the estate-holding hereditary lay aristocracy, which consisted of about 150 and 200 families. Each aristocratic family had to provide one male to serve as a governmental official. Most commonly, monk officials were either the sons of the Lhasa middle class or members of the families of existing monk officials. A small number of aristocratic families were required to provide a monk official for government service. At the head of the set of offices and positions was the Dalai Lama and when the Dalai Lama died or was a minor the Regent ruled in his place. Another important, but not permanent, position in the government was that of lonchen or silon, often translated as "prime minister" but not really an equivalent title. Beneath the Dalai Lama and lonchen were the offices of the Tibetan government. Highest government office beneath and the Dalai Lama was the Kashag. Kashag was the administrative center of the Tibetan government. The machinery of the government always worked in collective bodies eg. the Kashag, the Yig Tshang and Tsi Khang. The Kashag, the pivot of the government, decided little by itself. Almost everything went through proper channels to the Dalai Lama / Regent, who, in matters of foreign policy, usually consulted the government oracle and the Tshongdu (the national assembly), and also the abbots of Drepung, Sera and Ganden. With the exception of provincial and district governors the high officials has no fixed term of office and the

7 Goldstein, n. 5, p. 6
8 Ibid.
incumbent remained in their positions until they were either promoted or demoted. Normally there were two officials for each post, a layman and a monk, belonging to their respective cadres of government service, creating a system with checks and balances. Revenue did not all go into the central treasury, from there to be drawn for the expenditure of the government. The landlords- the nobles and the monasteries- shared the power and responsibility of the government.\footnote{Ibid, p.63}

Since the Dalai Lama went into exile in India, Tibet government in exile has been running from Dharmasala, India. The Assembly of Tibetan People’s Deputies is the highest legislative organ of the Tibetan refugee community. The Assembly consists of 46 elected members representing the three provincial regions and five major sects of Tibet.\footnote{Anand Kumar, \textit{Tibet: A Sourcebook}, (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1995), p. 111} The Assembly is headed by a Chairman and a Vice-Chairman. The executive power of the Central Tibetan Administration is vested in His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He is to exercise this power either directly or through officers and organs in accordance with the Charter. The Kashag (cabinet) is responsible for exercising executive powers subordinate to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Its members are elected by the Assembly of Tibetan People’s Deputies. The Kashag makes all the policy decisions, in consultation with and on approval of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. All the Kalons (ministers) have equal power and responsibility and they make decisions collectively.
Issue of Tibet has various aspects. Important among these are human rights, geographical area, socio-economic development, environment and ecology, religious freedom, preservation of culture and traditions, political and civil rights. Government of People’s Republic of China and Tibetan government in exile has different and opposite viewpoint on almost all these aspects.

Historically from 1911 to 1949 Tibet enjoyed complete independence. The communist revolution in China in 1949 and subsequent entry of Chinese army in Tibet brought an end to Tibetan independence. In 1951, Tibetan representatives signed a 17-Point Agreement, which opened way to the PLA despite the reservations of the Dalai Lama and his advisors. Chinese inroads into the traditional Tibetan way of life and non-fulfillment of provisions of the agreement touched off violent opposition, leading the Dalai Lama to flee to India in 1959. Guerilla warfare continued in some areas for a few years, but was effectively suppressed by Chinese authorities. United Nations General Assembly passed three resolutions in 1960, 1961 and 1965 and expressed its concern at the violations of fundamental rights, suppression of cultural and religious freedoms and right to self-determination of the people of Tibet. The Cultural Revolution in the 1960’s hit the Tibet hard. Thousands of monasteries were closed and destroyed. Tibet suffered irreparable cultural damage, and Buddhism came under attack as a feudal relic. With the end of the Cultural Revolution there was a policy review leading to liberalization. Inflow of Han Chinese slowed. More Tibetans were elevated to positions within the Region’s political leadership. Greater sensitivity was shown to Tibet’s religious and
cultural traditions. Monasteries were rebuilt and reopened. Many prisoners were released. The Dalai Lama sent a series of delegations to Tibet, and discussions with the Chinese began. Beijing indicated a willingness to accept the return of the Dalai Lama and his followers to Tibet under certain conditions.

1987 saw a major alteration in Chinese Tibet policy toward a harder line. The Dalai Lama placed a new emphasis on seeking contacts in the West in order to rally support against the ongoing destruction of Tibetan culture and religion. Late in the year, serious riots broke out in Lhasa in support of independence. It was followed by other outbreaks over the next few years. The Chinese responded with increased security measures, including crackdowns on monasteries. Martial law was declared for a time. Discussions with the Dalai Lama halted. Chinese hard-line policy culminated in Politburo meeting late that year that decided the Dalai Lama would not be part of the solution in Tibet. Talks with the Dalai Lama have effectively been sidetracked since then, though contacts continue sporadically. In September 1987 while addressing Congressional Human Rights Caucus in the United States the Dalai Lama put forward five-point peace plan, which proposed to make Tibet a denuclearized zone of peace, and called for commencement of earnest negotiations. But China did not respond positively. In June 1988, while addressing the European Parliament at Strasbourg the Dalai Lama proposed not to demand for complete independence if China grants a genuine autonomy to the People of Tibet. Though a major climb-down, China again disappointed those who were expecting an early settlement of the issue.
Question of Tibet has attracted global attention in general and attention of Western nations in particular. A combination of Western fascination with the religion and culture of Tibet, considerable international prestige of the Dalai Lama, issues like non-violence, human rights, democracy, freedom and the environment- all dear to Western public seem to make Tibet exert an increasingly powerful impact on the world. The Tibetans have succeeded in creating a powerful international constituency which China, despite all its efforts and resources in command cannot destroy.

It has not been always like this. In the 60's and 70's, the issue of Tibet was a taboo. Except the Tibetans, nobody wanted to talk about it. The world then divided between two ideological blocs opposed to each other had no time for a minor irritant like the issue of Tibet. The explosion of Solidarity in Poland, the people's power in Philippines, the implosion of Soviet Union, the Collapse of the Berlin wall and the massacre of students at Tiananmen Square in China, all helped to define a new sources of power: the power of grassroots activism. Tibetans excelled in this and concentrated on interested individuals resulting into a worldwide network of Tibet Support Groups. This in turn helped to create a strong international Tibet movement.

United States was not interested in Tibetan affairs before the Second World War. When Washington finally gave thought to Tibet in 1940s, it did so on Nationalist China's terms that Tibet was an integral part of the Republic of China, albeit with a qualification of Tibetan autonomy. Communist takeover of China and Tibet led to a rethinking. Later, as a part of its policy to check the spread of communist influence the United States not only refused to
recognize China’s sovereignty over Tibet but tried to give assistance to some of the Tibetan refugees in India and Nepal in attacking the Chinese troops in Tibet. ‘Garden Operation’, the guerilla training and arms dropping by CIA, between 1956 and 1961 were glaring examples. Successive United States government strongly condemned Chinese human rights practices and supported all three UN General Assembly resolutions that urged China to withdraw from Tibet. But, US position on Tibet shifted with Sino-US rapprochement. In 1978, the United States stated for the first time that Tibet was a part of the People’s Republic of China. With increasing internationalization of Tibet issue and emergence of a strong worldwide Tibet movement, public awareness of Tibet issue increased enormously in the United States. Tibet Support Groups, media, film stars have played an important role in this regard. This increased awareness and support for Tibetan cause has put tremendous pressure on congressmen and the government of the United States. Since 1987 Lhasa riot, US Congress has taken initiative by passing many resolutions in support of the Tibetan cause. In 1987 and 1989 the Congress condemned the brutal repression of peaceful Tibetan demonstrations by Chinese forces. The Congress welcomed and congratulated the Dalai Lama when he was awarded Noble Peace Prize in 1989. The Congress went as far as declaring Tibet an occupied country in 1991. The government of United States did respond to these congressional initiatives but had been careful not to jeopardize its relations with the People’s Republic of China. While the United States urges China to respect Tibet’s unique religious, linguistic and cultural traditions, and the human rights of Tibetans it
considers the Tibet Autonomous Region as part of the People’s Republic of China. For a permanent solution of the Tibetan problem the United States encourages China to start negotiations with the Dalai Lama or his authorized representatives.

Following chapter explains the Tibet issue and its various dimensions. Tibetan and Chinese viewpoint on all these aspects have been described. The process and factors causing internationalization of this issue has been analyzed in the second part of this chapter.