CHAPTER- 7
TIBETAN RELIGION AND BELIEF SYSTEM:
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

RELIGION: A WAY OF LIFE

Religion is considered as one of the most important aspect of the social system of a society. It is acquired by a person as a member of his society through socialisation or enculturation. Emile Durkheim (1961:62) defines religion as “a system of belief and practices pertaining to the sacred”. Religious beliefs are always group beliefs, shared by the members of society and preserving their unity. Everywhere religion has a “church”, a place where people come together for shared social action, while there is church of magic (ibid:60). Radcliffe Brown (1952) says that the religious ritual is an expression of the unity of society and that its function is to affirm and strengthen the sentiments upon which social solidarity and therefore the social order itself depends. In his study on the Andaman Islanders, Radcliffe Brown (1964:404) observes, ‘through regular expression in ritual, these important principles are kept alive and passed from generation to generation.’

Malinowski considered society as something that can survive only if its basic needs are fulfilled. In his view the religious rituals such as the magical ones, are carried out in situations of emotional stress. Among the Trobrianders the death of a member breaks the normal course of life and shakes the moral foundation of society (1960:53). However the society steps into lead the stricken individuals through the comforting experiences of religious ceremony (ibid: 62-63). Thus the religious dogma contains the value structure upon which the proper functioning of society depends and the society’s doctrines are
regularly acted may be safeguarded and transmitted to succeeding
generations (ibid: 67-68). The essential function of religion lies in the
maintenance, regulation and transmission of sentiments on which the
society depends. Religious rites unite the members of a society in a
common group and enforce the social interaction. It thus promotes the
establishment and maintenance of social patterns outside its own
immediate field.

Religion forms an important aspect in the social system of a
society. It holds the individuals in the social, cultural and the physical
relations. It maintains the individuals in the moral characters and binds
one into the right path giving the ideas of good and the evil and thus
helps to run the society smoothly. The religious rituals unite the family
as well as the community members by binding them into a group
holding the obligations of the rituals and the socio-ritual functions
towards one another. Religion also has provision of authority for the
belief and action. It has one of its most important functions in the
provision of meaning for social action. It gives pattern and order and
also interprets them in terms of ultimate ends. The magic is said to be
part of the religious activity which fulfills the personal problems and is
unable to serve the ends on the social system as a whole. The magic
cannot bring the social solidarity but the religious beliefs are the
common beliefs held by the entire community as a whole and serve to
fulfill their ends.

The unique feature of Tibetan life is the unqualified devotion of the
people to their religion, Tibetan Buddhism. It is an integral part of every
Tibetans life and is inextricably connected with all its aspects. It
dominates the peoples thoughts, plans and actions. It is their very life
nerve. Before its advent in the country, the religion was Bon-po, an off
– shoot of Shananism which at one time flourished throughout Asia, a
sort of nature worship. The Bon-poist priests wore black clothes and black hats and were greatly feared. Thus the Tibetan’s earliest religion is Bon, founded by Shenrab Miwo of Shangsheen in Western Tibet. With the advent of Buddhism, the Bon religion diminished in influence, but continues to thrive today with an active community of Tibetan refugees still practicing their faith in India and Nepal. Tashi Menri, Yungdrungling, and Kharna were some of the major Bon monasteries in Tibet. The Bon religion has imbibed many characteristics of Buddhism over the course of its historical development. Tibetan Buddhism, in turn, has also taken from Bon.

Tibet and religion, for a long time, the two seemed synonymous. To the Tibetans religion forms the essential basis of life. The Tibetan society values religion as primary and all other aspects of society as secondary. Among them religion and politics are combined. In pre-liberation Tibet, religion’s role was startlingly total, not only for the 20th century, but even by medieval norms.

The Dalai Lama is not only a spiritual leader but also the political head of the Tibet. Because of this combination Tibet developed into the most explicit theocracy in the world. The majority of Tibetans are Buddhist but there are other religious groups as well: Hindu, Muslims, Bon, and Christians. There is considerable religious tolerance, even though the Buddhist is in majority and head of the dominant religion is also the head of the state. This tolerance arises out of their attitude to religion itself; Tibetan Buddhists believe in the freedom of worship and the Tibetan Buddhism is very proud in outlook.

**BUDDHISM IN TIBET**

Though Buddhism had been introduced in Tibet many centuries ago and Tibetan students were sent to India to master Sanskrit and
understand the teaching of Buddha, it got great impetus during the reign of the king Sang Tsen Gampo (ruled A.D. c. 618 to 649). He had a Nepalese queen (Bhrikuti) and a Chinese queen (Konjo), both of whom were devout Buddhists and had brought with them sacred images of Lord Buddha. Konjo, being very rich, built a temple herself for installing and worshipping her images. Bhrikuti too built a costly temple in Tibet. Eventually Song Tson Gampo became a Buddhist and the new religion spread all over the country. Some elements of old Bon-po religion also found their way into the new one but within a century, Buddhism had taken firm roots in the country. But it developed and assumed its own characteristics and distinctive form when the great Buddhist monk scholar and tantric master, Padmasambhava brought his religious teaching to Tibet in 767 A.D. After spending some time in religious studies at the most celebrated and important centre of Buddhism in India, the University of Nalanda (in Bihar, India).

Padmasambhava introduced into Tibet the Mahayana vehicle of Buddhism that was prevalent in northern India which was reputed with the principles and practices of tantrism (which was currently particularity in Bengal). It deified the Buddha contained the worship of Dhyani Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, earthly Buddhas, female Budhisattvas (Taras), Maitreya, the Future Buddha and Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of divine wisdom. He selected Avalokitesvara (chen-re-si in Tibetan) the Dhyani Bodhisattva of compassion as the patron deity (or saint) of Tibet. Till the middle of the 17th century, many great Indian Buddhist gurus, scholars, missionaries, pundits and monks and erudite masters of the scriptures and the Buddhist canon were invited to Tibet or came on their own accord to spread the knowledge of the religion.

Numerous original religious books, texts and sutras in Sanskrit were brought by them and their translations into Tibetan began filling
the huge libraries of the monasteries. Many Indian Buddhist scholars came to the country when their religion had taken the root and when they had to flee to India because of the great difficulties and persecutions the Buddhists had to face under the Brahmanical reaction. They stayed on it in Tibet and became great teachers in the monasteries and in some cases the abbots also. There was more persecution when the Muslims invaded India. So the drain of eminent and erudite Buddhist masters continued from the eighth to the seventeenth century. Of these distinguished scholars was Shanta Rakshita, who came to Tibet after many years of deep and profound studies at Nalanda, at the invitation of King Tri Srong.

There had been no Buddhist ecclesiastical organisation as yet and it was Shanta Raksha who built the first Buddhist monastery at Ta-n-ye (30 miles southwest of Lhasa) whose abbot he was appointed. Twelve monks of the Sarvastivadin sect (of the original and earlier Hinayana form of Buddhism) also came from Nalanda to obtain the first seven Tibetan monks. This was the beginning of the system of monasticism in Tibet. After this many monasteries began to be built in different parts of the country and large numbers of men entered their portals and became monks. Although the Buddhism had now become firmly established, some features of the Bonism still persisted such as magic, sorcery, spirit worship, etc., the reform and purification of the new religion became indispensable.

Buddhism in Tibet has undergone three periods of development: the “diffusion of Buddhism”, a period from the spreading of Buddhism by Srong-btsan sgam-po (Songten Gampo) till the banning of it by King Dar-ma; the “prosecution of Buddhism”, a period in the mid-ninth century when king Dar-ma banned it; and the “revival of Buddhism”, a period of a hundred and fifty years (1057-1206) during which the Bka'-
The Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, the two leading living Buddhas of different reincarnations must be authorised by the central government and be legitimised through a formality called “drawing lots from the gold urn”. From then on, the Dge-lugs sect became the dominant religious sect in Tibet, keeping both secular and spiritual government under its control. In old Tibet, monks and nuns constituted more than 10 percent of the total population. Among monks, living Buddhas the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama were the highest. Living Buddhas and other high-ranking monks, many of whom were of upper-class origins, formed the upper religious circle.

The Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1655), and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties adopted a policy of patronising the Tibetan belief in Lamaism, which proved to be beneficial to their rules. Practiced in Tibet for over a thousand years, Buddhism has all-pervading influences on Tibet’s political, economic, cultural and social life. Nearly all Tibetans believe in Buddhism. They have private shrines at home, always carry prayer wheels and beads, and prostrate themselves to show their religious sincerity. In Tibet proper and other areas inhabited by Tibetans, and in the Mongolian areas, there are number of Lamaseries, of which the most eminent are Bras-Spungs (Drepung) Monastery, Jekhang (Zuglakang) temple, and Ramoche temple in
Lhasa; Bkra-shis-lhum-po (Zhaxilhunbu) Monastery at Xigaze; Sku-bum Monastery at Xining in Qinghai; Lhabrang Monastery in Southern Gansu; the Xilinhot Monastery in Xilin Gel league of inner Mongolia; and the Yonghe Gong (means “Palace of Harmony”) Temple in Beijing.

Each lamasery had a strict and complete system of organisation. Each religious sect possessed a number of lamaseries, among which there was a leading one for each sect. The monasteries of the Dge-Lugs sect occupied the highest status. All lamaseries owned properties, practiced usury, engaged in trade, and made money through receiving donations, giving oracles, chanting scriptures, and other Buddhist activities. As one of the three major types of lordship in Tibet, lamaseries put the local people under their control through political organisations, thus constituting an organic part of the local regime.

**Buddhist Reformers:** The first reformer was Atisa, a famous Buddhist from Bengal, thought to be the most distinguished Buddhist scholar of the day and the preceptor of the famous University of Vikramshila. He came to Tibet around 1039 A. D. and stayed at the Thoding monastery where his best disciple, Brom-Ston, formed a new Buddhist sect, the Kadam-pa. Atisa went on to the Samye monastery and died there doing the work of translation, etc. for thirteen years or so. He did a great deal in reforming the religion and in weakening the hold of magical practices, etc. and on emphasising the virtues of scholarship, studies and learning. Also from same university came the notable scholar, Deepankar Shrijnana and other pundits (of India) who came to preach Buddhism and help in the work of translating the many original Sanskrit and Pali and other works into Tibetan.
The different sects of Tibetan (Mahayana) Buddhism developed in Tibet as time went on: Nayingma-pa (8th century) introduced by Padmasambhava, Urgyen-pa (9th century), Samye being its chief monastery; Kadma-pa (11th century), established under Atisa’s tutelage; Sakya-pa (13th century), its monastery being the Sak-ya; Gelug-pa (or Ganden-pa), the reformed sect, whose founder was Tsong Khapa, the great religious reformer of Tibet, the monks of which were greatest in number than those of any other sect-their principal monastery (also founded by him) being Gal-den; Kargyud-pa, Karma-pa and Dekung-pa, off-shoots of the Gelug-pa; Duk-pa, its chief monastery being the sera; and Bon-po, and off-shoot of the primitive and pre-Buddhist religion, which has absorbed many practices and features of Tibetan Buddhism including the worship of Buddhist deities but continued to observe many of the Bonist ideas, rites and ceremonies.

Founder Of Buddhism: In its pristine and original form, Buddhism was atheistic; the idea of ‘deity’ became inculcated into it through its contact with Hinduism and Tantrikism. In the main, it is religion based on conduct and action (karma) rather than faith; it is intellectual rather than emotional and believes in the acquirement of wisdom and the dispelling of ignorance. The founder of Buddhism was Gautam Buddha (563-483B.C.) who acquired enlightenment at Gaya (in Bihar, India). When he was 35 years old he preached his principles of love co-mingled with compassion for all human beings, that living in the world should entail doing good to them and that the living of the holy life is all-important because it is good and right and alone can live to the extinction of suffering and to spiritual knowledge. He revealed the four noble truths: suffering, its cause, its suppression and the methods of suppression. The cause is craving desire and thirst (for impermanent things).
The method of suppression is the following Eight-fold Path of Virtue: right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, and right efforts, right-mindfulness and right rapture (in deep meditation). His dharma also enumerated the avoidance of extremes and the following of the ‘Middle Path’—avoidance of self-indulgence as well as of self-mortification. He also established an order or sangh of monks (and later of nuns). Everyone may not be able to gain the knowledge but each one can strive to conduct oneself according to the Eight-fold Path which will lead to the attainment of wisdom here and in future life. The aim of his teaching was that through such attainment a person could become a perfect being (arhat) or attain nirvana (not annihilation but a changeless, deathless and endless ‘satage’of bliss). He also laid down the rules of abstinence from the five great sins: taking life, lying, stealing, imbibing of the intoxicants and unchastity and the attainment of affection, consideration for others, pleasant speech, kindness and temperance.

This lofty and holy teaching developed into the Hinyana school of Buddhism but this ‘pure’ form of religion and religious action (as formulated by Buddha himself) became greatly corrupted and changed in India as time went on and Hinduism and Tantrikism influenced it so much that another school, the Mahayana (the greater vehicle) arose and it was this changed form that was carried to Tibet by the Indian Buddhist masters, who were great Tantrics as well, and it became incorporated into the Buddhism prevailing in Tibet and took root there. Belief became established in deities, super-human and super-natural beings, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas (one who having attained the right to Nirvana, desire to be reborn for the benefit of his fellow creatures), personal devotion, faith, rituals and prayer which Buddha had never had subscribed to. Two further important departures from the pristine
religion radically penetrated the fold which Buddha could never have thought of incorporating into his doctrine and practice were the worship of the deities (Buddha and Bodhisattvas) and the need for the faith.

Myths and legends also grew up about the Buddha and about other Buddhas having existed in the world before Gautam Buddha, as well as deities in the form of heavenly Buddhas (Jinas) and female Buddhas (such as Tara Droe-ma). The belief became established that salvation could be attained by faith in a Buddha, by praying to him or even calling on his name. Chen-resi was considered the patron deity of Tibet. Various schools of metaphysics were propounded, reliance on charms, magic spells, oracles, portents, mantras, mandalas, yantras and formulae, worship of images and of the scriptures and scriptural texts and observance of rituals and rites became essential parts of religious exercises and the Sanskrit canon became a necessary part of all religious practice. Insistence of abstruse and theoretical metaphysics debates, and discussions became popular. Turning the prayer wheel (always clock-wise), in which was placed a piece of paper bearing the mantra ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’ (om, the jewel is in the lotus—the lotus being the symbol of the essence of the teaching of the Enlightened one and the jewel, moksh (salvation) acquired through knowledge, became a constant and necessary ritual of faith, the wheel being placed every where and the mantra repeated by everyone at all times aloud or in the mind.

Although Tibetan Buddhism became infused with Tantrikism which appeal to the general run of the Tibetan people because there were analogous strains in it and in Bonism, the Sarasvastivadin sect of Hinyana Buddhism which was flourishing in parts of northern India including Kashmir and in central Asia, was selected by king Ralpachren (ruled 815-838) as being the best for Tibet. He permitted
translations to be made but only of texts of this persuassion, disallowed these on mysticism and tried to purify and simplify the Mahayana and Tantrik teachings that had taken hold of the religion. This approach appeared to the better educated and intellectual people who, of course, were in the minority. This reformist stand met with great opposition and this finer form of religion was ruthlessly suppressed within a short time.

**Belief In Tibetan Buddhism:** One of the basic beliefs of Tibetan Buddhism is that of transmigration, mind-stream and of reincarnation—that after death it is returned or is incarnated either in the ‘higher world’ or in the world, the new station depending on the *karma* in the previous life. A bad person could go to hell and after being tortured and undergoing appropriate punishment for evil deeds, rebirth took place in human form. The goal through reincarnation—for all living beings (human and animal; and even for the god)—is to reach the void and to this end the basic tenet—to be practiced—is the belief in non-violence, respect for life and the forbiddance of killing any living beings and the taking of life. Another remarkable features of Tibetan Buddhism is the institution of monasteries, the resident and monastic schools of Lamas. The first monastery, Samye temple, was founded about 779 (30 miles south-west of Lhasa) for the Tibetan Buddhist monk, Shanta Rakshita, who also became its abbot. Alternatively, it is said that it is founded in A.D. 823 or 825 at Samye by Padmasambhava and was known as Samye temple. Its model was the University of Udantapuri (in Bihar, India) about 19 miles from the famous university and monastery of Nalanda. Twelve Indian monks of the Saravastivadin sect were also invited from India to this monastery to ordain the first seven Tibetan monks.
Thousands of monasteries were built in Tibet through the centuries which were great centers of education and religious training. Elementary education was imparted to all the monks in the monasteries but higher education only in the bigger ones near Lhasa. For centuries the stupendous work of translating the original religious Sanskrit books and sutras and the Pali texts was done in big monasteries by erudite and devoted monk scholars (Tibetan and Indians). The biggest, most influential and richest monasteries built were Gan-den (Joyous) about 35 miles east of Lhasa which was founded in 1408 by Tsong Khapa, Dre-pung (the rice heaps) 4 miles west of Lhasa, founded by Jain-Yang Choeye, one of his disciples in 1418 on the model of the Dhanya Katake University (near the famous Amaravati Atupa in India) said to be the biggest monastery in the world, and Sera (Wild Rose Fence), 2 miles north of Lhasa, founded in 1419 by Jamchen choye, and the disciple of Tsong khapa. These three monasteries were known as the three seats or pillars of Tibet and were all Gelug-pa monasteries. Ganden was completely destroyed by the Chinese communists as were hundreds of others. Those monasteries that were not destroyed are used by the Chinese as offices. The few monks that are left are very old and occupy some parts of the monasteries. Another important monastery is that of Tashi-Lhungo built at Shigatse by king Gen-un Truppa, the first Dalai Lama (1447-53) which became the headquarters of the Panchen (or Tashi) Lama. The number of resident monks in these four monasteries was not less that 25,000. Some other important monasteries were Sakya (1073), Nethang (1213) south-west of Shigatse, Dirge (1548) in eastern Tibet, Kumbum (1578) near Lake Koko Nor in the north-east and Dregung (100 miles north-east of Lhasa), which housed over 3,00 monks. Several others (like Reting) have more than a thousand monks.
each. In addition to religious education, philosophy, metaphysics, medicine, literary studies, painting, printing, making of images and engraving were also taught. Derge Lhasa and Tashi Lhun-po were the biggest centres for casting bronze images were made, though bronze and metal images of Buddhist deities, stupas, etc., were made in almost every monastery.

Most of the monasteries have big estates which brought in great qualities of produce (in kind) and were also maintained by public grants and donations by trade and financial business-often conducted by those monks who have such practical learnings. Monks trained in the monasteries were of two orders: Lamas (superior order of monks) who went on with advanced studies for many years and ordinary monks. There were grade among the Lamas also-high, middle and low. Most of the monasteries were very rich and had beautiful and priceless objects of art, outstanding thangkas, painted scrolls, ornamental articles of value and taste and big libraries with thousands of books. They were not only sacred places but were built like fortresses-surrounded by walls with towers and bastions-to withstand the attacks of independent, marauding chieftains and tribes. They played the most significant part in nurturing and strengthening the religion and its priests and in the continuation of the principles and practices of the reformists Gelug-pa sect (Chopra, 1989: 55-56).

**Lamaism:** At least one member from every family adopts the religious profession by becoming a monk or a nun and entering a monastery. The parentage of such a child or person is strictly enquired into as he must not belong to one of the (lower) classes of goldsmith, blacksmith, tinker, shoemaker, butcher or the cutter-up of crops (as these trades are concerned with making weapons which are used in taking life and the last is a repulsive or disgusting trade). Thus to become a monk he
is physically examined. After a short time under the tutelage of senior monk, who is responsible for his religious instruction, education, general disciple and moral conducts, he becomes a novice under two tutors—one looking after his food and the other attending to his training, under whom he has to learn to read, write, learn by heart religious texts and moral maxims to guide his conduct and for both of whom he has to perform minor daily domestic duties and who are paid by his parents who also gives the tutors presents. After this stage he has to pass an examination and a physical test for fitness and a document is drawn up to which his thumb impression and the signatures of two sureties are affixed (for his good conduct). He is then admitted to a monastic college, after the abbot concerned has investigated his background, parentage, physical fitness and character, has received the payment and presents (“due” to him) and also has to pass tests satisfactorily which show he can repeat from memory the texts learned.

Silk scarves (khatag) are tied around the neck of the novice and his tutor and then he exchanges his ordinary apparel for the robes of a monk, which he would wear in future as a symbol of his renunciation of worldly things and his entry into the religious world. He has to take 36 vows and become a getsul. Accommodation is allotted to him (in a hostel of the monastic college) in accordance with the economic status; the wealthier trainees being placed in well appointed single rooms and each of the poorer ones having to share a poorly furnished room with 3 or 4 others. Scholar lamas who have attained great erudition are given private rooms irrespective of their wealth, rank or poverty. During this stage he has to devote himself to religious study, again, chiefly the memorising of long scriptural texts and passages from holy books. He then has to pass a higher and more difficult
examination, which many monks are unable to do, though many have marvelous memories and can memorise thousands of pages of holy books and of the scriptures. He has to give his one-third of allowance to the monastic funds.

The next rank in the monastic hierarchy is that of Drapa or ordinary monk. For attaining this he has to obtain the permission of the abbot to let him assist in the temple services (to whom once again he gives presents). For his initiation ceremony, his head is shaved except for a small heft and he has to wear the meanest clothes (those of beggar) and in the temple, in the presence of all the monks of the monastery, states that he, of his own free will, accepts monkhood as his profession. The abbot then cuts off the heft on his head and he is given the religious name by which he is known in future. He is exhorted to keep faithfully the rules of his sect, of the monastic order as a whole and to revere the Dalai Lama as the living Buddha and after he has repeated the Tibetan Buddhist “Refugee” formula, “I take refuge in Buddha, in the law and and the Sangha”, he becomes a Drapa- enjoys some of the privileges of a fully obtained monk. He has to undergo further training regarding how a monk has to behave, how he should sit, walk, conduct himself in the temple services, etc. He has to memorise all the rules regarding the general department of a monk, which are set out in the great religious book, the Kangyur. He now becomes the recipient of the privileges due to a Drapa, such as better accommodation, depending also on the progress he makes in his studies. For 3 or 4 years he has to undergo a very hard training, having to memorise many volumes of the scripture and pass many examinations without disgracing his tutor and himself. Repeated failure to pass the first examination within three years makes him liable for expulsion.
Those who fail remain monks but take up menial and other lay duties in the monasteries. Those who show special aptitude for the arts and crafts (such as wood-carving, calligraphy, painting, metal work, etc.) are given special training in the particular branch concerned and their talents are used for the benefit of their monastery. The studies undergone are very difficult and the knowledge of the examinee—usually the philosophic and metaphysical, is tested at public disquisitions where the most erudite lamas assemble and act as judges. The contest is between the examinee monk and one of his colleagues of the same standard or grade of which there are 7, according to the degree of erudition and the examination passed. If he passes his religious test and can hold his own in the disputation, he is declared successful. He has to continue his studies in the monastery for another 12 years after which he is eligible for admission as a privileged and fully ordained monk, or gelong, of the order and must observe 253 vows. A nun also has to go through a similar though not so exhaustive a probation and becomes a gelong-ma having to observe 364 vows. Some of the monks undertook more rigorous training. After psychological and physical training lasting over a number of years, a yogi can stand up to the bitterest cold in a single sheet of cloth. The title of repa, giving the right to wear a cotton garment, is granted by the teacher after a nightlong test, at the coldest time of year. Students who seems sufficiently advanced have to break the ice and plunge into the water of a frozen river, then dry with their own warmth and length of cotton dripped in the water and laid on the bare body. The successful candidate is the one who dries most pieces in a night.

Either before or after becoming a gelong, a monk can appear for certain higher examinations which lead to the holding of three high
degrees-geshe, which is the highest, ratjampa (only the most learned lamas reach this level) which is a doctoral degree, the recipients of which alone can become teachers and exponents of the Buddhist canon; rabjama and dorampa come next in order and possessing any of these enables a monk to obtain high and highly-paid office in government service or as an abbot of big monastery and also makes him eligible for an office in the temple, except those reserved for an incarnate lama. Monastic life of the Tibetans is hard with strict discipline and demands the sacrifice of life, learning thousands of ecclesiastical pages by heart, and cultivating a better mind by meditation for attaining the Nirvana. There is a great emphasis on discipline in monastic life. The Geluk-pas are not allowed to marry and indulge in enjoyments like drinking and smoking. They were prohibited to live in layman’s settlements. But as compared with other sects the Sa’kya-pa, in particular, is liberal and their monks can even marry and stay with commoners in their settlements.

In short, the monastic hierarchy was based on the dualistic principle of joint ness and hierarchical control. In everything and at all times, however, the overriding principle was the absolute superiority of the monastic order. The religious authorities had the right of control over the secular authority at all levels in the society. Firmly established in their eminent and unquestionable positions, the members of the monastic order almost as a rule derived the maximum advantage. In this way the Tibetan monasteries and ecclesiastics in most cases amassed huge wealth. However, religion also provided channel for circulation of wealth and power in both centripetal and centrifugal directions. To understand the dynamics of this circulation one has to reckon with certain difference between the ecclesiastic community and the individual prelate. The former tended to heard and accumulate
wealth and political power. The latter was often a factor in their circulation (Stein, 1972:148) but this should not in any way be allowed to dilute the fact that the Tibetan monastery was respected for its service to the people and the focal point of ministration to the community. The large monasteries thus did not sit over their heard of wealth but used some parts of their wealth to support the smaller monasteries. The distinction between the wealth of the monastery and personal property was, however, a tacitly and universally accepted fact and still maintained at the time when Tibetan refugees left their homeland. Further the monasteries also worked for well being of the people in the neighborhood, by teaching, lending out land and money, and food grains when the harvest was poor and, of course, fulfilling all kinds of religious duties (Norbu, 1968:200).

In Tibet the life of people was regulated by the divine will whose interpreters were supposed to be the lamas alone. Before anything was undertaken by the lamas must test the omens. The gods, as the Tibetans believed, must be unceasingly entreated, placated or thanked and all these through the lamas only. For the Tibetans the church was the highest court of appeal, and even the simplest monk was respected by the people and was addressed by the title of Kusho, as it, he were a member of the nobality (Harrer, 1970:162-163). Almost every people in Tibetan society took refuge in the ‘Three Precious Gems’, i.e. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The fourth refuge was the Lama, who symbolised all the three. Further, there was the protective deity, in accordance with the Mahayana belief, whose secret oracle was supposed to guide the destiny of the country. One from the other countries will certainly be surprised at degree of conformity and alignment in the Tibetans. Henirch Harrer, a Western traveller who stayed in Tibet for seven years, was struck by this phenomenon and
remarked that in Tibet all those years he never met anyone who expressed these slightest doubt about the truth of the Buddha’s teaching (ibid., 163).

**RELIGION AND POLITICS: THE OLD TIE UP**

In pre-liberation Tibet, the religion’s role was startlingly total, not only for the 20th century, but even by medieval norms. Its chief representative, the Dalai Lama, was also temporal ruler, as the pops in feudal Europe might have become if they had decisively won their centuries-long tussles with its emperors and kings. But did religion in Tibet, then, take the lead over politics and not the other way round? To suppose so would be to mix form, secondary, with content, primary. What was primary was politics. Tibet’s priest rulers were installed in the 13th century by the feudal emperors of all China, as a convenient form of local rule. Subsequently, their reincarnations were authenticated by drawing lots from a golden urn presented by Emperor Qianlong (1736-96). Within Tibet itself, Dalai Lama sixth, seventh, eleventh, twelfth, were all murdered, soon after or shortly before coming of age, usually by regents or other local power-holders who found them politically inconvenient. But the whole system of the Da ai ate did suit feudal serfowner rule. So it went right on, and new infant incarnations were found as instruments.

Why can’t politics do its own job in Tibet? There is an explanation historically. Religion is an ideological form which began as an attempt to explain by fantasy the forces of nature which man’s current knowledge could not yet find all reasons for (and later was prevented from finding, with all attempts to do so branded as sacrilege). In the sphere of social forces, whenever people of one class have come to be exploited by those of another, it has sanctioned that exploitation through irrational faith-providing a political myth to
restrain the ruled from questioning and revolt. Was monarchy tyrannical? With the rulers called Gods anointed, defiance became not only treasonable but blasphemous. And if a ruler was especially despotic and cruel, the humble subject could consol himself with the thought that after death, the wicked potentate would roast in hell while he himself basked in paradise. Or, as in Lamaism that while an oppressor might be reincarnated as a worm, the subject might be reborn as king (Epstein, 1983: 402-402).

In recent centuries the form of Lamaism was dominant, the yellow sect or Gelugpa was founded in the 15th century was originally purist and ascetic reforming tendency again earlier monastic abuses. But after it assumed full power in a more developed feudalism than that of the past, it became the centre and mainstay of all types of ruling-class oppressions and abuses. The Japanese Buddhist Ekai Kawaguchi, after a stay in the region at the opening of our own century, encapsulated the religious-political connection in his report that, for the hierarchical government, “the Holy religion is often justification when it persecutes persons obnoxious to it, and when it has committed any wrong it seeks refuge under the same holy name”. (Three years in Tibet, 1909: 493). In Tibet the semblance of equal opportunity was provided entirely by religion, through divinely appointed rebirth-with accompanying worldly advantage.

To serve as a body for a reincarnate living Buddha could happen-in myth-to any child. Indeed, because of rivalry of high feudal families and the danger of upsetting their balance of power, Dalai Lama were generally “found” in humbler, though not too humble, households. And the prize was not just the individual, but familial. The parents, brothers and sisters of each Dalai Lama automatically became a ducal clan and received broad lands and many serfs. There
was no other recognised escape hatch for commoners into the hereditary aristocracy of Tibet, though in practice the very rich bought titles. Kawaguchi wrote in his book, the relatives of boy-candidates brought the reincarnation itself. The oracle-priests “who take charge are in most cases men who make it their business to blackmail every applicant and are therefore extremely wealthy.” Lamaism was an ingenious political tool in other ways. Its inferno for transgressors was no: final. Damned souls will be transmigrated to one or more hellish lives on earth-yet still hope for upward mobility. As with the predestination of Calvanism-earthly wealth was a sign of divine favour. And lowly poverty was the penalty of sin. Yet Lamaism’s predestination was qualified-fail once, and you could try again. This, combined with the cruelest earthly punishment, kept the poor from being over-impatient. Epstein wrote in ‘1955, on my first visit to Tibet, I found such lamaist beliefs in fairly full sway, although people had already encountered new facts that did not accord with them. Serfs and slaves, astonished and gratified by People’s Liberation Army’s free medical treatment, courteous behaviour and distribution of relief gods, called it Buddha’s Army and thanked the goods for having sent it. By the end of 1965, he observed that the basis of the old thinking had been shattered. The altered position of religion in Tibet was a result of new fact: the new social system being built there called for no supernatural sanction (Epstein, 1983:405).

TIBETAN RELIGION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Tibetan national identity became indistinguishable from its religion. Buddhist folklore and teachings regulated the people’s lives, festivals, holidays, work ethics, family chores as well as national issues. Tibet remained a proud and independent Buddhist nation until its occupation by China. Buddhism flourished in Tibet in the seventh
century. Receiving royal patronage, it spread throughout Tibet. With the assumption of power by the Dalai Lamas from 1642 onwards, the era of “harmonious blend of religion and politics” was established in Tibet. Since then, for three and half centuries, ten successive Dalai Lamas have been the spiritual and temporal rulers of Tibet.

Buddhism has not been a mere system of belief to the Tibetans; it encompasses the entirety of their lives. Buddhism permeated the daily lives of the Tibetan people and formed the social fabric connecting them to the land. Of all the bonds which defined Tibetans as a people and as a nation, religion was undoubtedly the strongest.

In the words of the 14th Dalai Lama, Buddhism thus caused the “metamorphosis that changed the entire course of Tibet’s history. Generations of Tibetan intellectuals studied and developed a profound culture that closely accorded with the original principles and philosophy of the dharma. Down through the centuries their dedicated services brought about extraordinary developments which are unique among the literary and cultural achievements of the nations of the world.

Violations of religious freedom (1949-1979): The Chinese Government initially proclaimed that while complete consolidation of its annexation of Tibet was underway, no restrictions would be imposed on the practice of the religion. Its formal pledge to protect and respect Tibet’s religious tradition was stated in the “Seventeen-Point Agreement” of 1951. This “agreement” explicitly stated that the traditional status, functions and powers of Dalai Lama would not be altered and that “the policy of freedom of religious beliefs laid down in the common programme of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference will be protected”. However, the Chinese soon began to undermine the traditional source system and religion of Tibet. People
were told that “Religion is the enemy of our materialist ideology and believing in religion is blind faith. Therefore, you should not only have faith in religion but should also condemn it”. While the Chinese constitution and initial assurances made to the Tibetan’s purported to allow a semblance of religious freedom, their resolve to undermine Tibetan religion was absolute from the very beginning.

By the middle of 1950’s the Chinese authorities realised that religion was the principal obstacle to their control of Tibet. Therefore, from the beginning of 1956 the so-called “Democratic Reform” was carried out, first in Kham and Amdo, and later (from 1959) in central Tibet. Monasteries, temples and cultural centres were systematically looted of all articles of value and then dismantled. This physical desecration and destruction was accompanied by public condemnation of religion and humiliation and ridicule of religious persons. Religious texts were burnt and mixed with field manure; the sacred mani stones (stones or slates with prayer engraved) were used for making toilets and pavements; monks and nuns were forced to copulate in public and taunted to perform, “miracles”; ruined monasteries and temples were turned into pigsties; starving monks and nuns in Chinese prisons were told to get “food from the Buddha” (DIIR, 1996:75-76).

**Destruction before the Cultural Revolution:** Contrary to official Chinese assertion, much of Tibet’s culture and religion was destroyed between 1955 and 1961, and not solely during Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). This was confirmed by Bhuchung, the then Vice-President of so-called TAR People’s Government, at a press conference on July, 17, 1987, when he stated that what little remained to be destroyed was obliterated during the Cultural Revolution under the slogan “Smash the four olds”. Out of Tibet’s total of 6,259 monasteries and nunneries only about eight remained by 1976.
Among those destroyed were 17th century Samye, the first monastery in Tibet; Gaden, the earliest and holiest monastic university of the Gelugpas; Sakya, the main seat of the Sakyas; Tsurphu, one of the holiest monasteries of the Kagyuds; Mindrolling, one of the most famous monasteries of the Nyingmapas; Menri; the earliest and most sacred Bon monastery, etc. (DIIR, 1996:77).

1979-1994: Religious freedom, a ritualistic façade: Since 1979, a much-heralded programme of “liberalization” began in Tibet under which some superficial facades of religious freedom was allowed. This includes limited and selective renovation of places of worship, and allowing people a degree of ritual practices—such as making prostrations, circumambulating places of worship, offering butter lamps, reciting mantras, turning prayer wheels, burning incense, putting up prayer flags, etc. These are only external acts of worship. But propagation of the teachings of the Buddha is either banned or, when permitted, strictly controlled. The essence of Buddhism lies in mental and spiritual development achieved through intensive study with qualified lamas, understanding and practice. But the Chinese discourage this in their campaign to misrepresent the Tibetan religion as nothing more than practices in superstition and blind faith rather than what it really is: a functional and scientific philosophy. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in his March 10, 1987 statement, said: “the so-called religious freedom in Tibet today amounts to permitting our people to worship and practice religion in a merely ritualistic and developing way. There are both direct and indirect restrictions on the teaching and study of Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism, thus, is being reduced to blind faith which is exactly how the Communist Chinese view and define religion” (DIIR, 1996:78-79).
Reconstruction and renovation: Almost all Chinese State-sponsored reconstruction of Tibetan monuments has been highly selective, intended only to serve their political and economic aims. These serve as museums to attract tourists rather than living cultural and religious institutions. Also contrary to the Chinese claim most of the rebuilt or renovated monasteries, including the “state-sponsored” ones, came through the initiative of Tibetans who contributed their labour and finances. The aid sanctioned by the Chinese Government forms only a very small fraction of the total expenses incurred. On the other hand, China confiscates the income of the monasteries from entry fees (imposed by the Chinese) and offerings made by pilgrims.

In independent Tibet, the major Tibetan monastic universities served as cultural and learning centers for large numbers of students from inner Asia. These institutions each had from three to ten thousand students and the rigorous curriculum began around the age of forty-five. The basic units of Tibet’s monastic universities were its colleges, each university having at least two. These had their own administration, faculty and textbooks. For centuries, the monastic colleges functioned to promote critical and creative spiritual thought.

TRADITIONAL CELEBRATIONS

Rites, Rituals and Festivals: A Tibetan’s day start by 5 a.m. with homage offered to the family gods. Almost in each and every house they have puja room which is beautifully decorated with pictures and idols of their gods and goddesses. Everyday in the morning they fill the holy cup with water which is made of copper, or sometimes silver. These holy cups are seven or eleven in number and are arranged in a line on the altar. In the middle of it is kept a holy lamp, a short pedestal bowl, with a socket in the centre and with a cotton - wick. It is fed by butter. Altar is painted with a silken or cotton parasol, which is
in five colours i.e. yellow, blue, red, green and white is hung in the centre. This is a symbol of royalty. The picture of all household deities and lamas are arranged in an hierarchy on the altar. The images and pictures of lamas are kept in center since the Tibetans view lamas as the actually existing reincarnations of god. Next to them, come the protecting deities (yidam), the gods of wealth (Khando) and god of the defenders of faith of the Dharma-pala (chokayonw) and lastly the Sungma the family deities. All these deities protect the people from evil spirits and also uplift the householder to heaven.

In the morning, the womenfolk of a family after lightening the sacred lamp filled the holy cups (tings) with fresh holy water, and chanted mantras ‘Om Mani Pad_me Hum’. She also sprinkles holy water throughout the house. Then men and women in the house start reading the sacred books. After this, the ritual food—a mixture of five varieties of foods like ghee, milk, tsampa, chang and food grains is mixed and put on the fire, kept out side the house, as an offering to the god. The smoke, which raises from this, is believed to go as food to the deities and also the evil spirits. It is only after these activities the fast for the day is broken with a cup of tea.

**Holy scripts:** There are five sacred books of Tibet known as *Shungchen Kapunga*, which are placed on the domestic altar and worshipped. These books are believed to be very difficult to understand. But those teachers who taught the Dalai Lama and who are considered to be men of wisdom and knowledge, can understand them. The commoners cannot read these books. There are some books which can read and understand by commoners. These are: (1) *Ngaring Chemo*, which professes the oneness of all the five sects (chulu—the four Buddhist sects and the Bon-po religion) and also states that these sects are only the different paths to attain Nirvana. The
book, irrespective of sects followed by them, also states that the first means to achieve Nirvana are the reading of sacred books (Duwa) and the second means being the meditation (Nga). 

(2) Lamring Chomo-gives the people the rules of meditation, good qualities and moral character. 

(3) Kyapto Tejang Rim-po-che-Namdar is an Autobiography of junior teachers of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. 

(4) Khatang Tenga, a book written by Lobeng Rimpoche, in which everything about the Tibet’s future is written. 

(5) Sagyen Peja, a book containing the rituals to be performed for the family deities and spirits which help to bring fertility to the householder. The family deities are always kept decorated with flowers, maize and paddy stocks and the fruits, to get good luck and fertility to the family.

**Prayer Wheels and Rosaries:** While meditating and praying Tibetans turn prayer wheels and prayer cylinders. It is very common in old men and women in Tibet. They rotate the prayer wheel with the right hand which counting the beads in the rosary by the left hand. These prayer wheels are made of wood and lined with silver or copper and fixed with a wooden handle. There are tied with a weight. So, when it is rotated, it turns on the axil in hand. Inside the inner surfaces of these prayer wheels are put the sacred mantra- the *Om Mani Padme Hum*. There are also heavy sacred cylinders which are fixed to the table or cots in houses, and are also turned by very old and disabled Tibetans who could not move from one place to another place. Tsung- lien Shen and Shen-chi liu (1953:141-42) described the prayer wheel (*khor*) as follows: “The world rotates in a *khor* around Mount Sumeru; the sun and the moon around the earth; all living beings around the wheel of transmigration. Life rotates around some holy object like a lake, holy pagoda, a holy wall or a holy man.
The beads whirl around the fingers, and the prayer wheel around the sacred formula. Like this there are wheels turned around by fingers, by hand, by winds, by hydraulic power, etc. Tibetans, muttering scriptures, counting beads and turning prayer wheels continually walk around the monasteries. Rosary is named as ten-wa in Tibetan and commonly it is known as mani since it contains beads in it. There are one hundred and eight beads in a rosary. Customarily the rosary should have hundred beads. The extra eight beads are added to make up any omission of beads while counting the mantras uttered. The two end of strings of beads are knotted in such a way that each passes through three of the extra beads. The middle one will be larger than other beads. These extra beads are called mdo-dsin, which means the “union holders”, and they indicate the completion of one cycle of the rosary while counting and chanting mantras. Pair of strings of ten small pendant metallic rings, which serve as counters, are attached to the rosary. These rings help to count the cycle of the beads.

**Tibetan sacred and sacrificial objects:** Almost in all the ceremonies, an important item is used by the Tibetans the divine arrow (dadar), which is the symbol of male element. Thus the presence of divine arrow is a must to secure the divine rites. In Tibet a variety of darar were used in the rituals in honor of deities. These are: (1) a simple arrow with an iron point and a single shaft bearing three feathers is called as gyang sgrub madadar. A couch shell and three or five pieces of silk cloths are suspended from its shaft and all of them would be of only one colour. This type of darar is used in the ceremonies performed for ensuring luck and prosperity. This is also used in the Tibetan marriage ceremony, when it is put into the collar of the bride. (2) Tshe-sgrub-mdadar-the point of this arrow is made of iron and its
shaft has five ends; each bearing three vulture feathers, painted in five different colors, these are red, green, yellow, white and blue. There is a silk cloth attached to these five ends of the respective colors.

The third variety is same as that of first one except the silken streamers here are of five different colours-white, yellow, red, blue and green. According to Waddell (1974:424) there are seven recognized stages in any Tibetan rite, they are (1) the invocation-calling to the feast or scarification; (2) inviting the deity to be steady; (3) presentation of offerings- sacred cake, rice, water, incense, flowers, music and lamps; (4) hymns in praise; (5) repetition of the special spell or the mantra, (6) prayers for benefits already present, and to come and (7) benediction. All these steps are carefully observed to get the desired ends. On special occasions or festivals, the sacred food (tsemar) is prepared by mixing tsampa-the roasted flour with sugar and ghee. This offering for the gods is specially placed in a wooden box-throsho-chemol. During New Year festivals, relatives and friends who visit a family take pinch of tsemar and throw it towards the altar. It is repeated again and again about three times as an offering to the gods. At the end a pinch of it is put into their own mouth and utter Tashi Delek- meaning, good luck to all the family members. This shows their love and affection towards the family members whom they have visited.

Tibetans consider Chorten a sacred structure which they used to go round and chant mantra ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’. Waddell (1974:262) describes Chorten as ‘receptacle for offerings’. Tibetans go there daily in the morning as well as in the evening. The Chorten are sold domelike structures, convex-shaped upwards and crowned by a square capital surmounted by umbrella, the symbols of royalty. Chortens contain more plinths and are considerably elongated. Above
the square capital is the bluntly conical or pyramidal spire of thirteen step like segments representing the thirteen Bodhisat heavens of Buddhists. Upon this is placed a tapering pinnacle. They are mostly built as Cenotaphes in memory of high lama. A few Chortens in a Tibet were tombs built for high lamas. The dead bodies of high lamas were first buried in the earth and salt was put around the body and left for some days.

After few months, when all the organic matters were dissolved the skeletal remains were collected and pasted with clay and painted to give live appearance of the lama. The effigy was then placed in the Chorten built for him and the door was closed. (Arakeri, 1998:270). The shape of the Tibetan Chorten is like those of Japanese, symbolic of five elements into which a body is resolved upon death. The lowest section, a solid rectangular block, typified the solidarity of the earth; above it is the globe representing the water; fire by triangular tongue; air by a crescent the inverted vault of the sky. Near these Chortens are built rooms to deposit the small clay structures (tsadi) prepared as offering after the death of a person. Tibetans in difficulty, pray to the god to relieve them from it and in return they take a vow to denote stone slabs carved with sacred syllables, which are placed around the Chorten or on the hill (Wadell, 1974:263).

About sacrificial objects and offerings the form of offering depends on the nature of the god or the spiritual deity who receives them. According to Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:34). “A wrathful deity is given a gtor-ma consisting of meat and bone, a libation of blood and bile, a skull drums and high bone trumpets are played for its entertainment, etc., while a peaceful protector of religion is presented with such gifts as medicines, sweet and tasty food, fragrant incense and pieces of silk. The deities of both groups are further symbolically
presented with arms they carry, and dress they wear and the animals to ‘ide etc”. He further says that in the magical processes, the Tibetans consulted texts. According to these texts blood was used in magico-religious practices of Bon-po. The blood may be taken out from a dead body suffered from dangerous diseases, the menstruation blood of a widow or a prostitute, or the blood of a young healthy man killed in a flight or the blood of an eight year old child of an incestuous union, etc.

After coming of Buddhism in Tibet, these practices were replaced with liquids signifying blood were used in rituals. They are the ordinary water added with red colour or the water from 108 different springs, water from a glacier (gangschu) or from a state mountain (g-ya chu), milk (o-ma), Tibetan wine (chhang) or other alcoholic drinks.

By the total inflow of Buddhism in Tibet the Bon-po practices were left over. But their norms and values remained in the traditional Tibetan society. Though the Tibetans discarded the offerings of animals and human beings, they replaced them with vegetarian materials and these objects were sacrificed on the same old fashion. Under the vegetarian practices the three sweet substances-sugar (ka-ra), honey (sbrang-rtsi) and treacle were offered. Milk, butter and curds are also offered to the peaceful deities. The typical gifts which are presented to the wrathful deities are the black peas, radishes, onion, garlic and the yeast for making beer. All these are called as mi-dga-rdzas, the unpleasant eatables. The gtor-ma are prepared with the help of wooden moulds (Zau-par). Most frequently the barley flour was mixed with water, milk, blood or alcohol to make the dough (Arakeri, 1998: 268).

**LIFE CYCLE RITUALS**

According Van Gemnep all human beings are to pass through certain stages of life prescribed by their society. At every stage of
social recognition certain rituals are performed. They are called the life cycle rituals or the rites of the passage. The individual thus is recognised by the society and is accepted by the members in it. For example, an individual does not become a member of his society merely by being born. As an infant he is given a name publicly and presented to his kins and the members of his society. With this the individual enters into a new relationship with his community and the world with new responsibilities by passing through these life cycle rituals at certain stages of his life. Birth, marriage and death bring adjustments and readjustments in the social structure of a society. For example, after his marriage a person passes from his childhood to adulthood and this brings him a new status and new role to perform not only in his family but also as a member of society. This also brings change in the status and roles of other members of his family. The individual is not only elevated in his social but also in his ritual status. The rituals generally include religious purificatory rites, and ceremonies for sanctifying the body, mind and intellect of an individual. These rituals are significant throughout the life of an individual (Arakeri, 1998:277).

Because of the influence of Buddhism in Tibetans, they view life in two separate ways; one is the life of a householder and second is the monk. Among these the latter status is more important where societal good is stressed. Thus in Tibetan society social recognition rather than the ritual process is important. During the celebration of these rites, the role of monk or priestly group is not significant. But the rich families invite one or more monks and conduct the rituals for worldly benefits of that individual in future. But these rituals do not have any importance in the social acceptance of the individual.
The ritual of death: The cessation of pulse and the suspension of breathing are not considered tests of the extinction of vitality. The Tibetans consider that the spirit (*namshe*) usually lingers in the mortal frame for not less than three days, though the spirits of those who have attained to some stage of holiness quit the body immediately after the last breath has been drawn, for the communication with the dwellers in paradise, called Gadan or Tushita; but instances of saintly personages are of very rare occurrence. It is consequently considered a very sinful action to move or dispose of the corpse immediately after death. Nowadays the dead bodies of all classes of men are carefully kept within doors for three days, during which their friends and relatives attend on them and make prayers for their future well-being. On the morning of the 4th day the horoscope of the deceased, and that of the man who is selected to be the first touch the corpse for removal, are consulted.

A lama is employed to perform certain funeral ceremonies, with a view to cause the spirit of the deceased to pass out a certain slit in the skull. If this ceremony is omitted the soul will make its exit by some other passage and go to a state of damnation. The lama remains alone with the corpse, all the doors windows being closed, and no one is allowed to enter until he declares by what passage the soul has fled. In return for this important service he receives a cow, yak, sheep, or goat, or a sum of money, according to the means of the deceased.

**Tibetan fairs and festivals:** *Losar* is known as New Year in Tibetan. At the end of the each year, an astrologer would draw up a new calendar for the coming year. Celebrations began on the 20th day of the last month of the old year with Torgya at the Potala. Tibetans do not name the months but it is designated by numbers. All the seven days of week are represented by the sun, moon and the five visible
planets. In Ancient Tibet, the calendar followed a twelve year cycle. Each year was associated with an animal: horse, sheep, monkey, bird, dog, mouse, ox, tiger, hare, dragon and snake.

The entire population prepared for Losar with great care. The temples and houses were specially cleaned and repainted, and the white lace that surrounded the outside of the windows and doors are changed. Families used the occasion to change the brocade or satin sheets which surrounded the icons of the deities. Two weeks before the New Year, each household plant sheets of wheat or barley (lo-phud) in a jar. Tsampa mixed with butter (chemar) and offerings of wheat were put in special wooden boxes decorated with golden and silver paper banners and coloured butter. The offering was accompanied by a bowl of chang and khabse.

The Tibetan year begins in the English month of February. The Tibetan months (Dawa) are named as first month (Dawa Thango-bo), second month (Dawa Ne-wa) and so on up to twelve month (Dawa chu-ne-wa). Same as a week is divided into seven days (Za), the name of the each days is adopted from the Indian system, they are Nyima (Sunday), Dawa (Monday), Mig-mar (Tuesday), Lagopa (Wednesday), Pur-bu (Thursday), Pa-sau (Friday), Pen-ba (Saturday).

The New Year festival is celebrated in the month of February, the first Tibetan month, which comes after the harvest. This festival is mainly a merry making one and people pass the time in eating, drinking, singing, dancing, and playing games. In Tibet this festival was celebrated for full one month and now it is limited to only three days. This festival promotes closer affinity and friendship among the Tibetans and the people have an obligation to visit each other to exchange greetings. Relatives, friends and even people belonging to a common tribe or ethnic group assemble at one place- a house, prayer
ha I or a monastery and sing and dance. During this period the lamas at the monastery arrange for special worships and rituals. All the People from different class, caste gather and worship and listen to the preaching of the lama.

One day before the New Year, men and women take oil bath. On the first day of the festival they put on new clothes and traditional ornaments, which are not usually worn on other days. After that all the family members go to a monastery to offer some presentations to their gods and goddesses and also receive blessings from the monks. In the monasteries token gifts of cash and kind are also made. The gifts in the form of materials would be the idols of the deities and oil lamps and copper cups to fill holy water (Chu-ting). On the basis of the status of the people one can offer either copper, silver, or gold cups to the monastery. Along with these gifts they carry ghee, flowers and incense sticks. They bow to their deities lying flat (Tsak). Those who have taken a bow to the deity would take a round around the monastery.

The second day of New Year festival starts with a meeting with relatives and friends and exchange of feasts and especially kha-ta and Tibetan wine chang. On this day people visit their relative’s houses to make and maintain good relations. The third day of festival starts with a worship to the family deities, holy spirits and nature god. The lamas and other people assemble at one place in the village. They offer tea and chang to the holy spirits who control nature. They chant mantras in honour of benevolent deities from the sacred book, Gabo Kunga Dokham Thangmo Machik Pela. They also tie printed holy flags to the poles. The main feature of believing these holy flags is that these take away the bad spirits when they blow with winds. They also offer tsampa (flour of the roasted maize or wheat) food to the god of fire. At the completion of the long recitation of the syllables people assemble
and stand in a circle and throw tsampa towards the sky so that the spirits in nature who control it, will receive them. By dawn the old flags from the poles in front of their houses, are replaced with new ones and worship is performed for it. On the fifteenth day all the monks and lamas assemble in the main monastery of the village and observe the great prayer of Mon-Lam festival. History of celebrating this festival is that, a deity Ka-Ma-sha, the oracle deity of Se-Ra monastery. Ka-Ma-sha, was holding his position as the oracle deity of Se-Ra monastery at the time of the 5th Dalai Lama. It is believed that with the increase of importance to Dre-Pung, the Ka-Ma-sha became jealous. So he mixed some poison in the tea used by Dre-Pung congregation. But the Nai-Chung, the oracle of Dre-Pung monastery, hurdled a knife from Dre-Pung monastery to Lhasa and wounded the deity Ka-Ma-sha in his leg. From that day the Dre-Pung monastery started celebration on occasion of expelling Ka-Ma-sha from the monastery as the Greater Prayer Festival.

According to Buddhist scriptures, the Great Prayer Festival of Monlam, on the evening of the full moon in the first month, commemorates the Buddha’s victory over the heretics at Sravasti. The great Tsongkhapa introduced these festivities, which had been celebrated since the earth female ox year of the seventh 60-year cycle (1409).

At New Year when guests visited a home they would be offered chemar which is placed in a beautifully painted wooden box with two compartments, one hold barley and the other a mixture of tsampa, butter and sugar. One would take a pinch of chemar and throw a bit of it in to the air as an offering to the gods and a bit of it would be eaten. Chang would also be offered in a bowl and one would dip the ring finger in the bowl and flick it in the air and then a drop of chang would
be put on the tongue. Sheep’s head decorated with colored butter always adorned the altars to welcome the New Year. On this day, the children were dressed in new clothes and the adults put on their best costumes and jewellery. It is a costume that one must wear something new on this day. The houses were repainted and kathag’s are tied on the water jugs and other jars to bring about good luck (Pema, 1997:28-29).

In Tibet, festivals were also observed to mark the change of seasons. According to Tibetans there are only two seasons—summer and winter. They celebrated rites to mark the change in their dresses according to these seasons. The Tibetan fourth month is an auspicious month, for the Buddha was born and attained Nirvana or Buddhahood in this month. Tsung-Lien Shen and Shen-Chi Liu (1952:159) state that the whole month was considered as a meatless month and people also observe penance. They also said further that a few sat quietly beside the monasteries turning their prayer wheels and muttering scriptures. While other sat beside a running stream, dipping their water prayer wheels into the current. Still others went around the monastery prostrating.

Celebrations of water festival are other important festivals of Tibetans. Waddell (1974:509) says that it is a thanks-giving festival. On the festival day, after the puja the devotees run to nearby streams and canals and take a bath. Tibetans are not habitual to taking bath regularly. But on that day they take a cold water bath and request the water spirits to give them the sacred water. On the last day of the festival one member from each family assembles near the village gate under the leadership of the village headman. They go round the village fields carrying sacred books, photographs of reincarnated lamas, etc.
It is believed that these sacred objects drive away evil spirits and the lands are blessed by the lamas for a good yield of crops.

**Tibetan’s Birth And Death Rituals:** Tibetans consider a childbirth as polluting. So it takes place always outside a house in a tent which is erected away from the living quarter. The birth of a child thus defies both the mother and child. For three days in the case of a male child and four days in case of a female child, they are separated from the other members of the family in their society. After the third day, both mother and child are separated from the other members of the family in their society. After the third day, both mother and child are separated from the other members of the family in their society. After the third day, both mother and child are separated from the other members of the family in their society. After the third day, both mother and child are separated from the other members of the family in their society. After the third day, both mother and child are separated from the other members of the family in their society. After the third day, both mother and child are separated from the other members of the family in their society.

After that certain rituals are performed to the family deity seeking blessings for the mother and child and also to protect them from evil spirits. On the day of purification of the family from birth pollution, a rite is observed in which kinsmen and friends come with gifts, three sacred scarfs, one each to the father, mother and the newly born child, together with Chang, and some amount of cash or a piece of cloth to the child. The child’s materna grandparents and uncle also bring new clothes as well as one golden ring. On this day community members present tea, ghee, eggs, mutton, fruits, and tsampa. This ceremony of presenting gifts is locally known as Tam-dil. On the same day the naming ceremony (Pha-na Sa-ng) is arranged in which the parents give a temporary name to the child. A lama is consulted after one month to name the newborn baby.

Tibetans do not perform any puberty rites for girls. During menstruation period women are considered polluted and so for three days they are prohibited to go near the family members as well as in the monastery. After three days they are given holy bath and considered ritually purified. Tibetans do not consider death as a sorrowful act. They think that a chance is given to the soul to take a rebirth. They believe that rebirth is based on the good and bad deeds.
done in one’s previous existences. Tibetans believe that a dying person should forget his family, property and followers and concentrate on the lama who leads the soul. It is believed that these who die with desires will take a rebirth and his soul rotate through the cycle of birth and death-the ‘wheel of life’. According to Waddell (1974:101) the wheel of life has six forms arranged in the following form and order: (i) the Gods (Lha), (ii) Tibetans (Lha-ma-yin), (iii) Man (M’), (iv) Beast (Du-do), (v) Tantalized Ghosts (Yi-drag) and (vi) Sent to Hell (Nal-Kam). After death each soul is sent to these worlds depending upon the merit he possesses in his previous life. According to them the first three worlds are considered good and are known as heaven. The last three are termed as hell. There are eight types of miseries of: (1) birth; (2) old age, (3) sickness (4) death (5) existence (6) misfortunes and punishments for law breaking (7) separation from relatives and cherished objects, (8) offensive objects and sensation (Waddell, 1974:101).

Tibetans believe that it is necessary to conduct worship after a death, so that soul can be relieved from worldly attachment and to wish him a better life than one in any lower animal groups. Thus worships continue for seven weeks and many relatives and friends work hard for their success. Large numbers of guests are invited to the first and last day rites. Close relatives bring Chang and food in large quantity. It is believed that for forty-nine days the soul of the departed suspends in state of “middle being”, i.e. intervening between this life and the next. At the end, it reaches its destiny i.e. hell or heaven, depending upon its good and bad deeds in life. When any Tibetan falls sick, the family members consult a monk-astrologer to find out the reason of the disease. If the suggested remedies prove fruitless they may commission lamas and monks to conduct rites to remove bad spirits from the house and to recite sacred books for the patients benefit.
On death the dead body is covered with a sheet of white cloth. Then lamas are invited and he inspects the corpse to determine through which part of the body the soul has emerged. Tibetans believe that the saint’s soul escapes through his head and a relatively good man’s through his eyes. Escaping through the nose is an indication of the soul’s rebirth in Tibetans and that which goes out through the mouth would take its rebirth as an animal. The soul which goes out through the lower hole is believed to get rebirth in hell. It is only those whose soul which go out through heart and with pain, would take rebirth as human beings. After his inspection the lama starts reciting a prayer (Pho-giau). He then consult an astrological manual (tsi-pi) and a calendar (da-du), to know where, in which manner and by whom the corpse should be disposed off. In considering it the factors like the year in which the person was born, the day, month and week and the time of death, the consultation of stars at the time of death, the position of Pum-dung- a bird like structure with a human body are taken into account. In preparing the corpse for funeral rites no assistance is taken from any member of the mourning family. The fellow villagers who are experienced in this work do it. The corpse is then tied up in a sitting position with a rope and is covered in a white sheet of cloth and placed, with its back to the wall, near the main entrance to the house. Over its head is put a printed paper containing many auspicious symbols and syllabus to protect the corpse against evil spirits. The torma (the idol made in tsampa) are prepared in accordance with the astrological book-Drowa Kundrol, to represent the deities to be worshiped. Then the lama recite the mantras for the whole day and night, like the corpse is carried for disposal kinsmen and friends of deceased person and the family as a sort of consolation bring kha-ta to put on the corpse. They also bring chhang for the
members of the mourning family and also contribute in cash, for the funeral rites. The mourning family on its part entertain them with food, chnang and tea for the days till the disposal of the corpse (Arakeri, 1998:284-285).

TIBETAN RELIGION: THE PRESENT SCENARIO:

The Tibetans call India ‘Lagul’ i.e. a holy land, the land of the Buddha and many saints and sages, a country where there are many Buddhist pilgrim centers. It is the country where their spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, along with other great lamas have taken refuge. Thus one of the reasons of migrating to India is that of religious atmosphere. The values attached to their preference for India were invariably articulated through religious symbols. They also think that India is the birth place of Lord Buddha. It is a country where Lord Buddha attained enlightenment and preached his first sermon to the world. In India Tibetans have found the much-needed near-homely and secure environment. They are happy and grateful that India has offered them the maximum opportunities to pursue their religious and cultural aims.

Religion is the primary concern of the Tibetans in India; it is their heart and soul. Thus it would be interesting to see how this abiding faith strives with the newly emerging socio-economic forces that have laid a grip upon the Tibetans especially the younger generation growing up in India. Since the Dalai Lama shifted his headquarter to Dharamsala from Mussoorie in the year 1960, this place has become the centre of pilgrimage for the Tibetans and other follower of Buddhism. Dharamsala is a small town situated at the foot of the Himalayas, north-west India, in Himachal Pradesh. This deserted hill-resort has thus suddenly assumed importance on the world map. Since 1960 in this sleepy hill station many religious, educational, political and cultural institutions have been established by the Tibetans
so much so that some parts of the town have turned into exclusively
Tibetan localities. The town itself has come to be known as ‘Little-
Lhasa’. At the time of Tibetan New Year Dharamsala revives the glory
of Lhasa, when thousands of Tibetan pilgrims visit this town for
earning virtue. Even the poorest Tibetan refugee saves enough to be
able to make the pilgrimage to Dharamsala on this occasion. On this
occasion Dharamsala is at its religious best, in the truest sense the
palace is transformed into the symbol of deep religious faith of the
Tibetans. This celebration continues for a few days together. Everyday
special prayers are held and sermons are delivered by the Dalai Lama
and other high Lamas.

Dalai Lama who is also known as ‘Living Buddha’, whole year
people from the world, Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist, come to pay
homage to him and seek his blessings. The Tibetans who come
present a ceremonial scarf (khatak) to the Dalai Lama, as a symbol of
reverential offering, scarf-offering among the Tibetans being the
symbol of highest reverence. Tibetan refugees who are settled all over
India also do their best to maintain the traditional religious belief
system. They have also built monasteries (gompas), stupa (chorten) in
different parts of India wherever these settlements are located. Even in
Dharamsala and district Kullu many such chortens and gompas are
erected. In these refugee settlements we can observe the traditional
rituals being gone through with deepest, religious faith, such as ritual
being the Tibetan’s circumambulating the religious monuments. They
recite prayers with fervour and deep faith; in fact, old people are seen
reciting them almost throughout the day and night. Rosaries and
prayer-wheels are turned round and mantras are recited. Inside the
prayer-wheels and prayer-cylinders mani-mantras written several times
on slips of papers are kept. Tibetans believe that one round of the
wheel produces a hundred-fold effect; and these are turned round and round in a clock-wise direction by the monks and other devotees.

The prayer-wheels and prayer cylinders are the ritualistic modes to earn merit; though at the same time, one must admit that such rituals have made religion mechanical. They also construct mani walls, the tops of which are adorned with slabs engraved with the mani-mantras. It is also a part of the ritual to earn virtue in this life. Another important ritual is to read and recite the sacred books. Lamas pray in gompas often to the accompaniment of musical instruments such as long and short horns, copper plates and bells. All these lamas pray rhythmically and blowing couch-shells during their prayers. They are considered not only to earn merit and blessings for all but to ward off evil spirits, both considered essential on these important occasions.

Wherever the Tibetan settlements are in India we can see the prayer flags (tharchok), bearing different colours and embossed with Buddhist prayers, flying aloft on trees, poles, houses or hill-tops. In Dharamsala as well in district Kullu we can see these prayer flags in a Tibetan settlement which makes its own identity. Tibetans believe that these flags help in giving long life, eradication of evil spirits and material prosperity. Moreover the flags also symbolise the undying continuity of the heavy Tibetan tradition.

In Dharamsala and in district Kullu, some of the Tibetans have also continued their traditional practice of painting religious scrolls (thankas), and a few have taken to writing religious books manually. They believe that these occupations are not only for earning their livelihood or fulfilling the monastic requirements but also for accumulating virtue and merit. Thus these Tibetan refugees are trying their best to maintain the essence of their religion, including the accretions of astrology, magic and supernatural, though only for
Plate 21: Tibetan monastery at Manali

Plate 22: Lamas reading religious texts at Namgyal Monastery at Dharamsala
Plate 23: Tibetan worship room

Plate 24: Buddha's statue at Namgyal monastery at Dharamsala
Plate 25: Patients admitted in TMAI

Plate 26: Investigator turning the prayer wheels at Namgyal monastery, Dharamsala
economic reasons; the old splendour cannot be possibly displayed any more. What is of great importance from the anthropological point of view is that the Tibetan refugees have been able to recreate a nucleus of the old order and additionally through their strong initiative have developed monastic satellite societies. In this way Tibetans have shown remarkable initiative and activity in holding on to their traditional threads and weaving the fabric of their unique religio-social life a new on the Indian soil. In this way Tibetans in exile are making the best efforts to keep alive their cultural heritage and are erecting their typical religious institutions. There are many achievements which the Tibetan refugees has made after settling down in India. Tibetans set up a 'Lama ashram' at Buxa (in West Bengal) at the beginning of their stay in India. It is considered as the beginning of rehabilitation of the Tibetan religious functionaries in India. In the beginning, this institution functioned as a unified monastery for the followers of the different Tibetans Buddhist sects, for example, Gelug, Sakya, Kagyu and Nyingma. Most of the lamas were, however, the followers of the Gelug sect and came from its ‘big three’ monasteries i.e. Drepung, Sera and Ganden (all located in the neighbourhood of the Lhasa). The Buxa institution itself, which had become for all practical purposes a residential academy for the Gelugpa monks, was later on shifted to Palampur in Himachal Pradesh.

In 1963, at the direction of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Council for Cultural and Religious Affairs, called a meeting of four main sects of Tibetan Buddhism i.e. Sakya, Kagyu, Nyingma and Gelug, for their unification as well as the for urging them to make collective efforts to unify and strengthen the basic Tibetan beliefs. On this occasion the Dalai Lama laid a strong emphasis on the importance of the role of religion and religious leaders in the political as well as the
spiritual fields. He emphasised that it was substantially because of the loss of their spiritual freedom at the hands of the Chinese that they had to leave Tibet and seek shelter in India.

In 1966, there was another meeting held at Bodh Gaya. In this meeting it was resolved that each of the four main Tibetan orders should take up the task of providing its own religious centres in India. Its main purpose was to preserve the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and ensure proper rehabilitation of the different monastic groups among the Tibetan refugees. Because of these efforts monasteries or the branches of the four main sects have sprung up in every Tibetan settlement in Dharamsala, Kullu as well as other parts of India. Large numbers of monks belonging to Sakya, Kagyu and Nyingma sects have been resettled by their followers in various parts in India. Thus in Dehradun (Uttranchal) there is one of the ancient Tibetan Buddhism the Sakya sect has built its monastery. Nyingmapa lama, Dudjom Rimpochhe, has established a monastery at Kalimpong near Darjeeling (West Bengal). The monastery of Panchan Lama, Tashilhunpo, at Shigatse in Tibet is reported to have accommodated nearly four thousand monks. Now the monks and followers of the Tashilhunpo monastery have built a replica of original Tashilhunpo in the Tibetan refugee settlement at Byllacuppe in Mysore, with the aim of rallying and rehabilitating the scattered monks and their followers from the sacred monastery. At Dharamsala the main Gelugpa monastery has been established.

In 1959, two Tantric colleges had also been established at Dalhousie (H.P.) aiming to keep alive the Tantric traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. In 1961, at Dalhousie there was also founded a home-cum school for the young lamas and is called as Mahayana Monastic house. At all these institutions strict discipline is maintained and the
inmates spend most of their time in studies and prayers. All this testifies to the innate strength of the organised religion and religious faith of the Tibetan refugees, in spite of difficulties, the monks have managed to revolve once again the wheels of their monastic life which continues to vitalise their lives even in the changed environment. In the beginning when the Tibetans came to India they had many problems, despite which they have had the task of religious and cultural rehabilitation completed, if not only fully, at least substantially. At that time even they had no economic support.

But later on the necessary resources might have come by way of donations from outside; the task has been mainly achieved with the voluntary efforts of the followers of the different orders. The establishments of monastery have had to contend with the fact that a refugee population would not be able to sustain such a large number of monks. Thus efforts have been made to link up the monastic establishments with some economic enterprises, which would enable the inmates to sustain themselves economically. The reiteration will not be unjustified that thanks to the collective efforts of the Tibetan refugees, their old monastic structure has been re-established and replicated within an admirably short time, though on a much reduced scale; yet the question that remains to be unanswered about the stability of clergy; i.e. the number of people joining the Lamaistic order, and any quantitative as well qualitative slide down in this regard. In the first instance the answer should be sought in the situation created by the erosion of the great economic support which the Lamaist Church used to enjoy in Tibet.

The factors like welfare and humanistic role of the Tibetan Church considered as the most vital factors of the traditional Tibetan life. Naturally it was quite expected of the refugees that after their
basic physical needs had been fulfilled and they had been properly rehabilitated, they would give a very high priority to the replication of the traditional religious institutions and symbols on the Indian soil. But the lack of funds the progress has been slowed down. Those foreign donors and other relief agencies which have been financially helping the relief and rehabilitation programmes are very little concerned about the importance of stepping up the construction activities in the religious spheres. As a result of this financial strain, the effect on religious rehabilitation programme and the welfare activities of the Tibetan Church is adversely affected. In such a situation the refugees have risen above the despair or frustration and depending almost entirely on their own resources, which cannot by any means be adequate, have made commendable efforts towards the continuation of their religious tradition and almost all the offices and functions which religion used to discharge in their motherland.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s administration in exile, Council of Religious and Cultural Affairs always closely check the spiritual and cultural needs and activities of entire Tibetan refugee community. The council always maintains contact with the Tibetan Buddhist as well as with Buddhist of other countries. The council also ensures that the voice of each Tibetan Buddhist sect is represented in the Tibetan administration in India in order to facilitate the proper development of all the sects in the present state of exile. The Tibetan leadership is equally keen to preserve their religion and culture amongst the youngest generation and to prevent the growth of undesirable tendencies mainly that of alienation among them. In 1971, the Library of Tibetan Works and Archive was established at Dharamsala to preserve and maintain the pristine religious heritage. This institution also conducts regular courses in Tibetan Buddhism. Students and
research scholars from all over the world attend these courses in this prestigious institution. Tibetans in Dharamsala as well as in other parts of India proudly claim that through this institution they have been able to broadcast the gospel of Buddha far and wide. But more importantly the main objective of the institution is in maintaining and preserving the continuity of Tibetan religion and culture, the Tibeto-Buddhist philosophy, classics and commentaries, along with their systems of their meditation. This library is also preserving Tibetan books and rare manuscripts, which were brought by the refugees from various monasteries and their own houses from Tibet.

In the year 1960, the Tibetan Music, Dance and Drama Society was established at Dharamsala. It is an institution which aims at preserving the rich tradition of the Tibetan opera and lama dances. The members of this society give regular performances which enact the various facets of Dharma. The institution is also organising the Tibetan sacred dance ensemble and mystic dances which highlight both the sacred and secular aspects of the Tibetan life. Tibetans believe that these dances owe their origin to the great Indian mystic saint Padmasambhva who, in the hoary days of past, restored the sanctity of Dharma in Tibet. This is a voluntary organisation and depends on its own resources. This society also has been giving regular performances at various Indian centres and has also visited various foreign countries. In 1973, Buddhist School of Dialectics was established to maintain the religious and cultural continuity in exile.

In recent years, Tibetan Buddhism has reached a new milestone by making links with other countries throughout world, particularly with countries where people of the Buddhist persuasion live, and with the people of other religions as well. It has been observed during field work that wherever the Tibetans have settled, even in small numbers,
they have established their own institutions i.e. gompas, meditation centres and Buddhist societies etc. According to Tibetan Demographic Survey 1998, the total population of Tibetans, by religion, is 79278. The table 7.1 shows Tibetan population by religion in India. Out of 79278 there are 44740 are males and 34538 are females.

**Table 7.1: Tibetan population by religion in India**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Buddhist</th>
<th>Bon</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>79278</td>
<td>78903</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44740</td>
<td>34538</td>
<td>44504</td>
<td>34399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cent’al</td>
<td>5042</td>
<td>4159</td>
<td>5036</td>
<td>4151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>8916</td>
<td>8381</td>
<td>8903</td>
<td>8367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>13464</td>
<td>11854</td>
<td>13264</td>
<td>11745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>16684</td>
<td>9562</td>
<td>16670</td>
<td>9554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>1634</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>582</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source – TDS, 98.

There are two major religions i.e. Buddhism and Bon. To which most of the Tibetans belong. In India there are about 78903 Tibetans who are Buddhists. Among these 44504 are males and 34399 are females. Tibetans who are of Bon religion are 276 in number in all over India. Among these 181 are males and 95 are females. Religion of other than Buddhist and Bon are 99 in numbers, out of these 55 are males and 44 are females. It can be observed from the table that most of Tibetan refugees in India are Buddhist. It also shows the domination of Buddhism among Tibetans. During the field work it has also been observed that monks in settlement have changed considerably. The monks have adopted many new ideas and customs. It is observed among the monks of younger generation that though they lead a religious life and lived in a holy environment, a few of them do not
follow religious law strictly. One of the respondent monk from Nachung monastery at Dharamsala said that whenever we get free time, we watch T.V. programmes and movies and also listen to Hindi as well as Western songs. He is also a good thangka painter and planning to make it as his career. When I visited his room, I found it is well furnished and in the corner of the room a music system has been kept. He said that if he ever get a chance to go abroad he would definitely go there. When we were having formal chatting, he requested me to fill up his passport form. He told me that he could make some mistake in the filling up of the form, so he requested me to fill up the form. It is observed that they are even attracted by various profitable ways of earning money such as taking land on lease and lending money on high rate of interest and have bought worldly and luxury articles such as radios, TVs, vehicles etc. Some of the respondents regretted that strict code of conduct prescribed for the lamas is fast breaking down in exile. In Tibet the lamas were not allowed to visit anybody’s house unless on a religious purpose, or to go to any public place like market etc. Apart from the general norms a lama had to follow a strict code of “religious laws”, with which no liberties could be taken. But here in exile these rules are no longer strictly followed and the lamas have been forced to dress like any other lay person, except wearing tongas (robes) which symbolise the specific sects to which the lamas belong. There are also cases of extreme deviations, like use of hard drinks. It is also observed that some lamas had to cook for themselves instead of spending their time in holy works.

In Tibet usually one member of the family from each generation, more often the younger brother joins the monastery. But this tradition of sending the family members to the monasteries has been weakened a great deal and which has affected the recruitment to the monastic
order. Those conditions are intended to be initiated into monkhood are sent to the monasteries at a very young age of five or six. These are left to the case of a teacher who gives them spiritual education. In very few cases the grown up monk students have left the monasteries to accept the worldly life. Respondents said that these monks are attracted more towards the worldly matters than spiritual ones. In exile the devaluation of the Tibetan monastic order in the changed situation can also be observed. In the traditional system, the higher and powerful lamas used to live in magnificent isolation from the community. But here in exile they live in the community. The charisma of the high lamas seems to be fast wearing out.

For Tibetans, monasteries play an important role in their life. Being the seats of religious activity, they attract commoners at the time of major festivals and other functions. The worships conducted by the abbots and the senior lamas provide them with an opportunity to visit the monasteries and receive blessings from the lamas. Thus the monasteries and rituals conducted in them also provide an opportunity for the lay Tibetans to come together. People from different sects come together and they feel that we all are one. His Holiness the Dalai Lama advises his people to stay together and forget the old order and try to adopt new situations in exile. Today in these settlements debates on religion, philosophy etc., also take place between monks of different sects. Usually these debates take place at the time of major festivals and these are presided over by the seniormost lama. Common people as well as monks of the settlement attend the debates. Sometimes people from other settlements also attend the debate and discussions.

During fieldwork in Dharamsala and in district Kullu it is observed that most of the respondents feels that at present most of our old traditions are not practiced by Tibetan in exile. Earlier in Tibet,
everyday early in the morning, female members of every family after 
lightening the sacred lap, filled the holy cups (ting) with fresh holy 
water, and chanted mantras ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’. Now here in exile 
this routine is disturbed because of new environment and new 
occupations followed by them. Here they do not get much free time to 
do all these rituals. So they simply repeat sacred mantra for some time 
and start their day.

It is also observed that only the older generations are continuing 
their traditional rituals. These older people read the sacred books daily 
in the morning as well as in the evening. Rest of the time they remain 
busy with their household duties. Those who are very old and cannot 
read and write, counts beads from the rosary and recite mantras. On 
the other hand, it is observed that the middle aged and younger 
generation are devoting comparatively less time to religious affairs. 
The main reason behind this is not getting much free time to spend on 
worshiping. They also said that unlike in Tibet here they have to 
struggle hard to earn a comfortable living and most of them are 
aspiring for more materialistic wealth.

Whatever the new environment and new settings, Tibetans in 
new place still firmly love their own religion. From Table 7.2 and 7.3 in 
Dharamsala and district Kullu, it can be observed that most of the 
Tibetans think that their religion is the best among all other religions. In 
Dharamsala about 64% of the respondents and in district Kullu about 
77.6% of the respondent said that their religion is the best among all 
the religions. While on the other hand 36% of the respondents in 
Dharamsala and 23 % in district Kullu said that their religion is not the 
best among all but said that all religion are equal. There is no 
difference between one religion to another. They think that God is one
and thus whichever religion we choose, our ultimate goal is to approach the God. It is also observed in Dharamsala that 60% of male respondents and 70% of female respondents said that their religion is best among all. In district Kullu 75.4% of male and 79.5% of female respondents said that their religion is the best among all.

Table 7.2: Tibetan religion is best among all (Dharamsala)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you think that your religion is best among all?</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.3: Tibetan religion is best among all (District Kullu)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you think that your religion is best among all?</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>77.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tibetans believe that Buddhism is the best religion because there is no any violence in it. It is the religion of love, peace and affection. They also believe that Buddhism is very liberal and there is no restriction in preaching the religion. They value religion as primary and other aspects of society as secondary.

From table 7.4 and 7.5 in Dharamsala and district Kullu it can also be observed that not even a single respondent wanted to change his or her religion. Hundred present of the respondents from Dharamsala as well as from district Kullu said that they never want to change their religion. They believe that wherever they are in any part of the world they will be Buddhist only. It also shows their faith in Buddhism.
Table 7.4: Shows wish to change the religion at Dharamsala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you ever wish to change your religion?</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>

Table 7.5: Shows wish to change the religion at Kullu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you ever wish to change your religion?</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

After migrating to India since last forty years most of them were born and brought up in India. Those who had migrated after 1959 and settled here in new environment faced many problems. Here in new settlement everything was new for them. e.g. way of living, food and cultural differences were the major problem for Tibetans in new settlement. Difference in religion from local area was also one of the major problems to adjust these refugees. It is because, for Tibetans, their religion is everything. But now here in new settlement Tibetans are gradually loosing their traditional religious belief system. It is also observed during field study that only the older generations are following their old traditional religious system, while on the other hand, younger generations are loosing traditional religious system. They are adopting new style here in new settlements.

Table 7.6 and 7.7 shows that both in Dharamsala and district Kullu, most of the respondents believe that their religion is affected by non-Tibetan religion. About 65% of respondents in Dharamsala and about 73.7% in district Kullu believe that their religion is affected by
non-Tibetan religion. It is also observed that 66.6% of male and 62.5% of female respondent in Dharamsala and 72.2% of male and female respondents in district Kullu said that their religion is affected by non-Tibetan religion. 28 years old Dechhen from Dharamsala said that even we young people also feel that we are not as much religious as our older people are. But she also said that it is not possible to continue same traditional religious belief system in new settlements. She said that here everything is different from Tibet. The locals are Hindus and we are here in a new area living as minorities. So automatically the impact of local religion on our religious belief system is admissible.

**Table 7.6: Shows effect of Non-Tibetan religion at Dharamsala**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is your religion affected by Non-Tibetan religion?</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7.7: Shows effect of Non-Tibetan religion at Kullu**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is your religion affected by Non-Tibetan religion?</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>73.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About birth and death rituals of Tibetans in these settlements it is observed that only few rites and rituals are practiced here. In Tibet childbirth is considered as polluting incident and so always took place away from their house. Both mother and child had to stay outside the house for a few days. But here in these settlements these customs are rarely observed. Because of impact of local customs and lack of space
and facilities these customs rarely followed. The only room available for the childbirth is the room where altar is put. Because of ritual pollution involved in birth, ideally this room cannot be used. But a curtain is put to separate symbolically, the altar from the area where birth takes

About death rituals in Tibet the corpse was disposed off only after three to seven days till the auspicious day came. One of the respondents from Manali said that in Tibet we disposed off our dead bodies by providing it to the vulture. He felt that here in the new place it was not possible to do all these rituals because of locals’ different rites and rituals. “Here in settlement we dispose off dead bodies within one day and that too by cremation and not by other means. So the act of consulting the astrological book has become redundant in this respect. Here, we immediately after the death a few rites are performed and the body is cremated in the cremation ground.”

Cremation of dead bodies in these settlements brought a few psychological and value problems to these Tibetans. Its major impact is seen in older people who wanted to dispose their corpse in one of the traditional methods. The funeral procession is preceded by a lama who tinkles a bell as he walks. After reaching the cremation ground the body is covered with wood. A distant relative lights pyre and never a close relative like son, brother, father, husband wife and sister. The lama present at the funeral chants mantras and sprinkles the eight different offerings such as mustard, wheat, rice, barely, buckwheat, grass and linseed to the members of fire. When whole things burn down to ashes, the funeral party goes back to their respective houses. Later, the ash is collected and mixed with mud and colour. In this mixture a number of small idols of their favourite deity, are moulded. Later on these are placed in a holy place called chorten.
During death rites, in the new settlements, only a few lamas are invited. An Invitation of lamas depends on the economic status of the family. On the other hand, in Tibet many monks and lamas are invited to chant mantras and to read sacred books. To all these activities senior lama guides them. Here, these days the time duration of the funeral rites have been shortened, simple and also less expensive.

Change of place made the Tibetans to include a few more and new fairs and festivals. These fairs and festivals are celebrated here according to the Tibetan calendar. Tibetans celebrate New Year festivals in the month of February. This festival is actually a merry making for all people celebrating it by drinking, eating, singing and dancing. In Tibet it is celebrated for the period of one month. But here in settlements it is celebrated for three days only. The main reason behind this is lack of time and space, financial problems, new environment and the impact of local people who celebrate New Year festival for one day only.