



Sacred Rituals and the Transnational Political Identity: The Kalachakra Puja at Bodhgaya as the Cultural Foundations of Tibetan Nationalism in India

Anshuman Ankit ^{1*}, Dr. Md Ehtesham Khan ², Dr. Shailendra Kumar ³

¹ PhD Research Scholar (JRF Fellow), Department of Public Administration, Magadh University, Bodhgaya (824234), Gayaji, Bihar, India

² Professor, Department of Political Science, Magadh University, Bodhgaya (824234), Gayaji, Bihar, India

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Gaya College, Rampur, Gayaji, Bihar-823001, India

* Corresponding Author: Anshuman Ankit

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Abstract

The Tibetans are a 'Nation in Exile', the majority of them having found refuge in India after the brutal suppression of the revolt in Tibet by the Chinese which began on March 10, 1959. The 14th Dalai Lama fearing the worst escaped from Lhasa and sought asylum in India and ever since the Dalai Lama's asylum in India there was a steady influx of Tibetan refugees to India whom the Indian Government settled in different settlements all over India. Under his guidance, leadership and inspiration, the Tibetans in exile have kept the fire of nationalism burning although there has been a brutal suppression PLA inside Tibet. An intense nationalist struggle is being waged by them in exile which is non-violent and peaceful.

The Kalachakra puja is one of the most significant ritual congregation in Buddhism traditions, which has emerged as a powerful transnational sacred space where Tibetan Buddhist practices intersects with its ultimate political identity. Being held at land of enlightenment Bodh Gaya- the most sacred site in the Buddhism religion- the Kalachakra puja represents not merely as a global event but as a symbolic platform for vividly articulating Tibetan nationalism in exile. This study examines how ritual performance, inter-generational heritage, collective strength of Tibetans-in-exile and sacred geography contribute to the reconfiguration of their national consciousness beyond territorial boundaries. Application of internal disciplinary scholarship from religious studies, political sociology, and nationalism theory, the study implies that the Kalachakra puja operates as a vivid form of non-violent political expression that echoes globally in sustaining Tibetans identity under political constraints and decades of displacement. It reaffirms transnational solidarity among tibetans-in-exile living globally while simultaneously communicating a moral political voice for their cause of identity. Finally it highlights how sacred rituals can serve as a cultural resistance and heritage preservation of a society in exile contributes to understanding how tender application of religion in social fabric sustains nationalist flame regardless of statehood for decades and facing systemic exploitation.

Keywords: 14th Dalai Lama, Buddhism, Bodhgaya, Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), The Kalachakra Puja

Introduction

Tibet is said to be the heart of Asia. The importance of Tibet is immense due to its geo strategic location. It is the world's largest and highest plateau covering an area of 2.5 millions sq. km and extending 2400 km from east to west and 1448 km from north to south, its entire southern face being flanked by the mighty Himalayas to its south. It has always been a vast thinly populated plateau crisscrossed by rivers and mountain ranges. This has resulted in difficulty in communication between the various regions, which in turn has given rise to various sub cultural systems within Tibet. In fact there never has been a homogenous cultural system in Tibet with a plurality of traditions customs and political affiliations. With its huge landmass, Tibet has acted as a formidable buffer between the countries flanking it.

The British understood its strategic importance as a buffer in the Great Game being played out between the Russian expansionism which posed a threat to the British Empire in India. This was the reason why the British invaded Tibet in 1904 and established its presence at Lhasa. The British breach of this buffer caused great insecurity in China which had always perceived Tibet as a natural shield from British expansionism from the west. In this context a Manchu Chinese official had made a valid observation: *"The head, in a sense, shields the face; Tibet is the buttress on our national borders."* This strong buffer between China and India was essentially eliminated when China acquired Tibet in 1951; for India, which had a border with Tibet rather than China, this border was now the Chinese border. The acceptance of Buddhism by the Tibetans was the main factor which provided some element of commonality amongst the Tibetans. Buddhism mingled with the traditional and indigenous Bon religion to produce a distinct Tibetan socio-political and religious system. It would not be incorrect to say that Tibet was not just a country but an entire civilization much heavier than the country itself. In the process of its cultural assimilation over a period of thousands of years the Tibetan civilization not only drew the entire Tibetan people within its fold but also brought within its fold diverse people living across the entire plateau and the Himalayas. Different racial types have lived in Tibet side by side the predominant being Mongolic.

Historically Tibet and China were connected through a Priest Patron relation, where the Dalai Lama symbolizing the spiritual headship of the Tibetan Buddhism was the high priest of the ruling Chinese dynasties. This benefactor priest relation between the two was known as 'Mychodan', and a careful patient analysis of this relation is quite useful in understanding the dynamics of the Sino Tibetan relations historically. The ruling dynasties of China posted their ambassadors (known as Ambans) and through them sought to exercise interference in the court of the Dalai Lama. A British traveler visiting Lhasa in the late 18th century noted that although the Tibetans do not bend under the authority of the Chinese court, yet they are overawed by its influence which produces timidity and caution which is more reflective of subjects rather than equal allies. However, historically the China Tibet relations cannot be just simply understood from the perspective of power relations alone. Power was seldom expressed or desired; rather it was inherent in the cultural symbolism and court culture typical of many pre modern Asian relations.

The complex tale of Tibet, whose integration into the People's Republic of China continued in different junctures post 1950, propounds specific challenges. Tibet formally lost its sovereignty in 1951 with the signing of the seventeen point agreement between Tibet and the Peoples Republic of China by the 14th Dalai Lama. Ever since the Tibetan question has remained unresolved. The Dalai Lama sought refuge in India and the refugees who accompanied and followed him were settled across different locations across India. The granting of asylum to the Dalai Lama was followed by the India China war of 1962, although the border dispute was the primary reason. The Tibetans have been waging an intense national movement in exile which is non-violent and waged through the media. The Tibetan Government in exile, which is known as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) has its headquarters at McLeodganj, Dharamshala. The CTA now

endorses the Middle Way path advocated by His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama which calls for genuine autonomy for Tibet within the Chinese Constitution. The Tibetan question is the product of historical legacy of Tibet China relations. There is a colossal human tragedy with no sight of their exile coming to and with the settlement of the Tibetan question. The Tibetan diaspora is scattered all over the world, the majority of them being in India. For past 70 years Tibet continues to be governed by PRC while Tibetan system of government existed till 1959 until Dalai Lama took refuge in India. But the very prominent argument: of broader progressive policies of assimilation of Tibet into PRC sovereignty consolidated thorough socio-economic policies, administrative development, different tenancy reforms and not the least instituting Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) brought during 1959-1965 made it look annexation into fully incorporated state. But these progression and humiliation didn't hurdle the unrest and struggles of the local Tibetans which eventually continued till 1970s.

An annexed state and its constituent population are never steady until it is soothed by stability and relentless progression. Peace always accompanies development and growth which in the case of Tibet can't be spurned just because the incorporation of the region was backed by the socio-economic or administrative integration though it lacked peace in the region. Interestingly peace and harmony can be induced forcefully and by military deployment to enrich the process of incorporation. Supposedly, the Chinese government since 1970s without any doubt must have comprehensively availed the socio-economic and administrative measures to reintegrate and assimilate the region and its societal structures to commensurate to those of the People's Republic of China.

Research Methodology

The study is based on qualitative and interpretive research methodology which employs thematic analysis aimed to analyse the interconnections between religious rituals and nationalist identity in the context of the Kalachakra puja held in Bodhgaya. The Kalachakra puja is treated as an analytical case to understand how a sacred religious events function as alternative political spaces in contexts of statelessness and displacement. The research application of secondary data sources draws upon theoretical perspectives on religious rituals, the politics of exile, and transnational nationalism. Authors own observations and interviews with the devotees during Kalachakra puja immensely helped to interpret and conceptualise non-violent political expression as a civilizational heritage which have been sustaining nationalisms among tibetans-in-exile.

The lost statehood: How Far Tibetans Right to Self-Determination Is justified?

From the Tibet's perspectives it is assumed that while being granted right to restitution to Tibetans there could be definite geographical complications with it. While it's obvious that both right to self-determination and right to self-defence is interlinked with the extant of sovereign state and its people which at the same time it is comprehended that geographical application is limited with the population of the erstwhile state's territorial expansion. Debate arises that if the former state's territory is confined with the settlement of its population then its conflicting because ethnic Tibetans

continue to settle way far from its territory beyond its three native regions of U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo into India and Nepal. Nevertheless, during 1912 when Tibet announced independence its central authority was able to exercise and administer in only one of the three regions which approximately encompassed modern day TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region).

However, Tibet's demand for self-determination will be acknowledged only within the territory it had administered before annexation if there seems to have negotiations on this argument. Undoubtedly unification of Tibet of its three regions/territories which will definitely result in proliferation of Tibetan territory mooting the doctrinal discussion. There are definite complications with the right of restitution which has its orientation for reorganizing and re-establishing its sovereign land as it must be separated from the right of minorities within the state which assumes similar proposition of determining individual community right and right to self-determination. This minority may choose to secede from the state in order to ward off threat of existence from the state. This state of affairs is upheld in the international law and dogmas which pronounces that if the rights of minorities and its human rights within the state are endangered and if state fails to carry out its duties towards sovereign people; the rationale for breaking away is affiliated. The UN Declaration of 2625 affirms this rationale.

Ultimately, Sinification explicitly assumes the contrasting views as once the right to self-determination is granted, Tibetan in order to safeguard their traditional ethnic identity and uphold their discreteness within Tibetan territory which is ultimately going to take divergent views as it infringes the right to freedom of movement of rest of Chinese population. Subsequently, taking a close look on policy of family planning which had been the decade old strategy of Chinese government is more vicious for Tibetans due to its sparse and meagre population which could even culminate in demographic decline or more perilous kind of stagnation.

It is significant to remind that right to self-defence of Tibetans doesn't warrant the fact that they desert or forsake the very urge for right to reconstitute or re-establish their sovereignty of independent Tibet. Right to self-determination of Tibetans is enshrined as available option for legal status of Tibet's sovereignty, concomitantly right to self-defence has dimension oriented towards both territorial jurisdiction and people who constitutes the state. These two rationales are contrary to each other which entail different visions for state. However analyzing them: self-determination is legitimate demand for which Tibetans are capacitated to accomplish equally as a minority in the region and as an erstwhile sovereign people who makes up Tibet; howbeit Tibetans right to self-defence is justified only to the degree in corollary to Tibetans who fled and are refuge outside their former state. Undoubtedly, what is of utmost importance today is potent urge and course of action for effectively accomplishing the political discord though conflict-free measures. Global community and international forums needs to play proactive state of affairs to conclude the Tibetan legitimate status. They have preserved their culture and kept alive their national consciousness.

Future Trajectories: Tibet in a Changing Geopolitical Landscape

His Holiness Dalai Lama have always mooted and proposed for 'Middle Path' which was very basis in process of enlightenment of Gautama Buddha. Middle way of the Dalai Lama is principled in the outlook where he terms the Chinese central government to look after defense and foreign affairs. Whereas in education, spiritual matters and at some extent to economy; the policy framework to be devised by Tibetans themselves. In abstract the Dalai Lama speaks about mould of administration and governance where Tibetans to hold authority and govern themselves on their own where they can manage and work. At the same time Chinese must assist Tibetans where they lack expertise and modernization. This middle way of the Dalai Lama which he proposed at different discussion whether it was in his "5-Point Plan of 1987" which was followed by "Strasbourg Declaration" orients that Tibet to be associated with China. On the other side of all this, demand for conducting plebiscite among Tibetans stirred by Government-in-exile in Dharamsala got fueled since mid-1990s in hope of reinvigorating and fixing the political tussle and struggle.

However, it was December 1997 report on Tibet by International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) which endorsed "referendum" as apropos. In between, full scale independence for Tibet seems quite complex though realistic or unrealistic demand it may appear to be. It is quite inherent with the option that current scenario presents itself as for mere "autonomy" in place of independence which will subsequently result in endorsing and heralds accepting Tibet as part of China. With regard to all options and proposals Tibetans concomitantly holds "self-governance" as right of choice to enrich their socio-economic, environmental and cultural matters as pivotal for comprehensive division of competencies within the People's Republic of China (PRC). This in orientation of self-determination of Tibetans that upholds and presupposes that self-defense to population is inevitable. Autonomy for Tibet within People's Republic of China is enshrined in the philosophy that if Tibetans encircle themselves to autonomy provided it must be institutionalized and comprehensively assured by constitution, undoubtedly more than the Chinese constitution does today.

Autonomy for Tibet within PRC will be accompanied by numerous issues that could certainly flounder the very steady autonomy conceived. In due course of volitional autonomy prescribed with China there may be facet of imposition to modulate and groundwork arrangements to incorporate ingress of non-Tibetans in the settlement. Thereby hangs a tale that in order to accomplish this aim, Chinese would certainly countenance the autonomous Tibetan Government to stabilize and enhance their socio-economic layout to such magnitude which could encounter the demur and challenges by non-Tibetans or Chinese influx of immigrants. Consequently, keeping all this in mind the intensity of unification necessitated at present time it is sine qua non to principally let up and slacken the process in various identified domain to ensure consolidation in actual terms. Though the past few years and modern days brinkmanship by Chinese government necessarily isn't pragmatic enough.

Options are always there to create win-win persuasion but ultimately it's the central authority of both the sides: Government-in-exile in Dharamsala and government of People's Republic of China to accept the nuances.

Tibetan Rehabilitation and settlements in India

In common parlance refugees are considered to be forced migrants who are uprooted from their native land and continue to live without national boundaries and no governmental security. Tibetans, who crossed over their native land to soil of India is the most complicated and hotly debated matter globally for past 60 years but their survival in India is the tale of modern day magnanimity. Almost for a decade China continued to shake entire Tibet with its ruthless and wicked policies. Consequently, Tibetan National Uprising of 1959 made Chinese authority to vehemently resort to path of cruelty and barbarism which ruthlessly killed more than 90,000 Tibetans alone in Lhasa, where nuns and monks being the prime target. His Holiness Dalai Lama along with his 13,000 followers escaped from Lhasa to India by taking most arduous journey of their life and sought political asylum from Government of India.

By the time the settlements in all parts of country sprang up which according to recent govt. official data total up to 46 Tibetans settlements, some of them also continue to exist in neighboring areas of India in Nepal and Bhutan. It is notable to remind that Tibetan Refugee Settlement Camps have been re-established and rehabilitated mainly in three sectors of livelihood: agriculture being the primary one; secondly it was agro-based industries and finally to Tibetan's own native skill of carpet weaving and handicrafts. Spread across several Indian states, including Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka, the settlements serve as cultural, educational, and political hubs of the Tibetan diaspora. Through institutions such as schools, monasteries, and cooperatives, they sustain cultural continuity while enabling economic self-reliance. Despite legal and economic constraints, Tibetan settlements in India remain resilient sites of identity preservation and non-violent political expression in exile.

Tibetan Government in Exile

Soon after his arrival in India, the Dalai Lama successfully negotiated the establishment of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile with the Indian authorities which resulted in reestablishment of Tibetan Government-in-Exile at Mussoorie, named as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) of His Holiness Dalai Lama. It was bit contrary to theory of having government of alien land within host nation's own sovereignty but GOI showed mettle and empathy with the Dalai Lama cause for Tibet. In actual terms the CTA was the further continuation of Government of Independent Tibet on the land of India. Soon, within a year during May 1960 it was decided to shift exile Government of Tibet to McLeod Ganj at Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh, place whose climate is more identical to that of Tibet. The CTA is reorganized as the Tibetans sole and legitimate government and has itself the twin task of rehabilitating Tibetans refugees and restoring the freedom of Tibet. The 'Charter for Tibetan-in-exile' is a document which is adopted for the interim period in exile. In the year 1990, the Charter was drafted by the Constitution Redrafting Committee which was instituted by the H.H. Dalai Lama. It was under the Eleventh Assembly which in 14 July 1991 unanimously

passed the Charter and on 28 June, 1991 the Dalai Lama gave his assent to Charter. The Charter is in accordance with the International Law, compatible with the laws of India and especially it is in compliance of the situation in exile. The Charter enumerates the rights and duties of the exile refugee community. But its guiding force is rooted in homeland Tibet. The Kashag (Cabinet) is the highest executive office of the Central Tibetan Administration. The term of the Kashag is for five years

The Tibetan National Movement In Exile

The Tibetan freedom struggle in exile has been more symbolic than confrontational as in Tibet. The Dalai Lama who has persistently sustained the cause of Tibetans in exile has seen decades of tactical up and downs within the community in exile concerning their want for freedom and independence of Tibet. In the meantime he never accepted the violence as a means for inculcating nationalism within Tibetans. In order to perpetuate the patriotic feelings the Dalai Lama endorsed the path where acceptance of peace and affinity towards their fellow Chinese. The above two excerpts substantiate the two parallel pathways that influence the nationalism of Tibetans living in exile globally. Nationalism is the spark of nation building which in turn constructs the diversity into one society. For those who have been force to live outside their motherland and live watching their land being tuned into distorted civilization, with no means to overcome and counters the impacts; takes a lot of perseverance to sustain their patriotism. For past 60 years, majority of Tibetans living in exile have vehemently carried down their mission for independence of Tibet.

Various national movements in small fractions in the form of several initiatives embellish the Tibetan national movements in exile. Accordingly, after a vivid analysis we can classify the elements that build the Tibetan nationalism more explicit; as these are the constituents which didn't existed before the Chinese invasion of 1950. It was only after the 1950s that Tibetans were more proactive and came to show their want for formal independence movement. These elements mainly revolved around the more traditional and heritage of Tibetan culture which is ultimately prime driver of Tibetan struggle around the subcontinent.

Since the early years of exile, it has been established within the global community that the fate of Tibetans and their exile is absolute and massive difference between two societies (Tibet and China) will sustain forever. Yet for decades, the Tibetans and their generations haven't lost its mettle to struggle for their cause of independent motherland. The strength for the survival of nationalism within the community is from Buddhist philosophy, which teaches that nothing in the mundane world is permanent. Since the 1980s, the exile Tibetan struggle has been subdivided into different specific rights that are communicated in different international forums. The promotion of such specific rights provides the international activists with symbolic and ideological instruments that are utilized.

The Tibetan Nationalism

Among the exile population, Tibetan nationalism and the national unity forms the eminence in their very existence on the alien land. India being their second home and most of Tibetans who haven't even seen or went to Tibet them too, are imbibed with the nationalist feelings for their very

motherland. A closer look of the Tibetan nationalism gives the specifics that it is nourished and influenced by the very traditional and heritage of Tibetan societal norms. Tibetan Buddhist nationalism represents an important source for the CTA to cultivate national and international support. The CTA emphasizes in its political course Tibetan nationalistic ideas to reach all Tibetan people independently from their place of living to motivate them to participate in the exile struggle. Though the traditional aspects have continued to bolster the nationalism of Tibetans living in exile, the very new generation of community has too shaped the process of proliferation of nationalism. The result can be seen during the evolution of exile community within Indian settlements and even the scattered Tibetans everywhere.

Post 1959, Tibetans found India as their safe land to sustain their life and heritage simultaneously as it peoples in exile took shape to form settled society. For past six decades the generations of Tibetans have been residing in the exile society where they are now strengthening their voice for permanent residence and identity of Indian citizen as the new generations who are born in exile; haven't been ever to their motherland. Though they are progenies of exile, they wholeheartedly admire their birthplace. Being permanent resident of 'host country' it could strengthen their motivation for Tibetan cause and sustain their heritage.

Not so long when these exile communities made India their home, they found themselves very close to holy land of Buddhism. In fact the practice of Buddhism and inculcating themselves the very strong feeling of nationalism is too powerful that always puts them in process of showing loyalty to their motherland. In this case by following both spirituality and nationalism on the same line, Tibetans have always gone a step ahead. The traditional heritage and spirituality that Tibetans upholds and have sustained for centuries, is something that had always fascinated the global community. The very preservationist notions of Tibetan "tradition", "heritage", "spirituality and "culture" completely separates from all other civilizations. These all defines what it meant to be Tibetan, but though preserving all the traditional forms of heritage it seems truly contradictory when these same Tibetans living in exile are always pierced by the fact that they have to get their land free from Chinese takeover. They tend to get shaped by both the feelings of being Tibetan and surviving their Tibetan identity in the exile.

The Kalachakra: Wheel of Time

In the Tibetan Vajrayana, one of the most profound and esoteric Tantric practices is known as Kalachakra, which literally translates to "Wheel of Time or time cycles." The three distinct forms of the Kalachakra (Wheels of Time) are said to contain the complete meaning of the Kalachakra tantras, which are regarded as the highest and most treasured teachings of Buddhism. The Kalachakra is a spiritual concept that alludes to austerity, ascetic practice, and teachings. It is inaugurated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who talks to Buddhist practitioners in large numbers in accordance with their traditions and practices. The Kalachakra reveals how humanity and nature work together to commence the binding of release. Humans' basic existence is determined by breathing, which correlates to the planet's cycles, but the Kalachakra conjures rituals to accumulate and awaken the subtle energies that are dormant within each person and formally root it to the path of Buddhahood.

The Kalachakra tantras are divided into three parts: the Outer Wheel of Time, the Inner Wheel of Time, and the Inner Wheel of Time. The outer wheel of time, which is associated with the Kalachakra, is thought to be the outer world or external environment of the universe, encompassing all of the planetary bodies as well as the lunar or solar days. Kalachakra explains or incorporates time cycles and the motion of the universe in connection to a person's physical body and mind. The teachings of Kalachakra explain the birth and death of our solar system, the Four Ages (Yugas, Gold, Silver, Copper, and Iron), and the prophecy of King Suchandra, who predicted a major cosmic conflict that would occur 300 years from now, in which barbaric armies with weapons of unfathomable destructive power would threaten life on Earth. It is said that if one undergoes the Kalachakra initiation, they would be reborn in the army of light led by Shamabala King Rudra Chakrin during the Great War. The Inner Wheel of Time, which stands next to the External Wheel of Time, represents the fundamental aspect of humanity and its physical structure, which profoundly recognizes the inner Jambudwipa, or the surface, which is as enormous as the earth. The earthly body's natural components are what cause the inner wheel of time to spin, releasing the limitations. The inner and outer wheels of time are connected, creating a synthesis of both. They appear to have organized the relationship and interdependence between the inner and outside wheels of time, where the physical structure of the outside world is linked to the natural and spiritual vibes of the body. Lastly, the Alternative Kalachakra instruction, also known as the Other Wheels of Time, is a crucial and fundamental initiation that describes the different generations of tantric advancement and practices. The "guru" leads his followers on the way to the Shri Kalachakra during this crucial stage.

The Kalachakra Puja and Global message of Buddhism

Since the first Kalachakra initiation in Norbulingka, Lhasa in May 1954; His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and a number of other spiritual leaders of Tibetan Buddhism have taught and administered the Kalachakra initiation all over the world, from the United States to Europe, enabling Buddhist practitioners in the West to become sufficiently empowered to engage in and practice meditation. The Kalachakra initiation has drawn enormous numbers of participants and Buddhist devotees from all over the world; in Bodhgaya alone, the number of pilgrims surpasses that of all other initiation ceremonies conducted worldwide. The Kalachakra stimulates the spiritual growth of Buddhists who benefit from the observances and are inspired by the teaching.

His Holiness has preached at the last 34 Kalachakra Pujas, most of which have taken place in India. According to him, the Kalachakra Puja is a legacy of Tibetan Buddhist spirituality, which his fellow Tibetans have been upholding for years by "presenting it as the imitation for global peace and prosperity" by pursuing the route of unity. For him the Kalachakra Puja is heritage of the Tibetan Buddhist spiritualism which his fellow Buddhist Tibetans been sustaining for years by "presenting it as the imitation for global peace and prosperity" by following the path of oneness.

The Kalachakra initiation has been held outside India and Tibet on several significant occasions, reflecting its growing transnational character. Notable international Kalachakras

include Madison, Wisconsin (1981)- the first outside Asia; Zürich, Switzerland (1985); New York, USA (1991); Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (1995); Toronto, Canada (2004); and Washington D.C., USA (2011). These global sites transformed the Kalachakra into an instrument of cultural diplomacy, allowing the Tibetan exile leadership to engage international publics, reinforce diasporic cohesion, and project Tibetan political identity through non-violent, ritual-based soft power mechanisms.

Land of Enlightenment and reinvigoration of Tibetan Buddhism

British archeologist Alexander Cunningham restoration of Bodhgaya and his work about the Bodhgaya and Buddhist holy sites in Tibetan language "Guide to India" (*r Gya gar lam yig*) described and motivated all the native Tibetans to take a journey to Bodhgaya. The book came as an arousal for the Buddhist people in Tibet as it also represented the Hindu dominance in the Bodhgaya Holy land. It is significant to remind that in period of revival of Buddhism; Tibetans actually adapted and accepted the Buddhist customs and rituals that wasn't really their own heritage. In the age of revisionist Buddhism they too adapted some non-existent Tibetan Buddhist practices which in return influenced the Bodhgaya and its Buddhist traditions as it was in period of development for the modern Buddhist spiritual propagation. Similarly we can ascertain that there were lots of other preliminary and fundamental Buddhist customs and traditions that were nowhere mentioned in the Tibetan pattern of worship. Probably it was that hybrid aspects that Tibetans were aspired with. Tibetans besides paying offerings and regard to the Mahabodhi temple and main shrine they used to show same regard to the sacred Bodhi Tree as anything in the Mahabodhi complex. For Tibetans Buddhist the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya has a prime importance in Buddhism due to its veneration my Buddha himself where he attained enlightenment. For centuries when Tibetans used to be on pilgrimage in India at several holy sites of Buddhism they didn't have any souvenir to carry back to their native place. Soon they were first Buddhist faction who made different methods to make their pilgrimage more resounding and powerful by performing several rituals to Bodhgaya.

Bodhgaya as a nodal space for Tibetan Nationalism and Buddhist Universalism

Bodhgaya have been the holiest and most important land for Buddhism since revival movement of modern Buddhism. After 60 years in exile the Kalachakra Puja at Bodhgaya has been an integral method of propagating the strength and determination of Tibetan people in exile. It evokes utmost nationalist feelings among the fellow Tibetans living in exile. They propose to show the dedication and the heritage they have been preserving for past decades seem to have strengthened their position in full independence of Tibet. The secular concept of a Tibetan identity runs along the lines of a Western terminology of nationhood and in this regard, appeals to an international audience. Additionally, there are numerous traditional religious rituals that are officially celebrated and are part of an annual celebration calendar, like monastic cham dances, which dramatize transition, Tibetan New Year celebrations (losar) or the mönlan chenmo, the great prayer where religious power takes over from the secular. Moreover, they support the process to distinguish the

participants of the rituals from others who are excluded. Therefore rituals and ceremonies help to create a self-perception and identity. The New Year celebrations are followed by a national commemoration of the Tibetan Uprising on 10 March, 1959 in Lhasa. The unifying symbol bridging both events is the Dalai Lama, the king and god, the active agent between this world and the next. So the core symbol of the Tibetan nation is the institution of the Dalai Lama.

The Kalachakra Puja at Bodhgaya proved to be the focal point of instilling nationalistic feelings among the Tibetans in exile and sympathy and genuine cause for Tibetans among the fellow followers of the Buddhism. These diverse natures of Tibetan cause in recent years have heightened the process of formal acknowledgement by the Tibetans in exile for their independence and restoration of Tibetan heritage. They are regularly pushed and shaped by immense feelings of showing their side of courage and self-determination, being in exile and resounding their solidarity and utmost loyalty to continued independence struggle. Even if they are living in exile Tibetans with the different culture and society, they have been able to slow the acculturation to Indian culture and societal customs which definitely bruises the cultural aspects of the refugee community if it just doesn't let it get inculcated with the very primary creed of cultural restoration process.

This remains one of the focal aspirations among the Tibetans both inside and outside the Tibet; presents itself to the global community as a relentless warrior of Tibet voicing for its cause of independence. The importance that Kalachakra puja at Bodhgaya have gained since its first official organization by the His Holiness Dalai Lama had gave both the Tibetans and its identity of spiritual heritage to global debate. Being the holy land of enlightenment "Bodhgaya" seems to be well framed stage to showcase the international community to stand with both the Tibetan communities living inside and outside the Tibet. The organizing of Kalachakra Puja is almost on par with the Tibetans upholding their stand for independence of native land and restores their heritage and culture in the native place. The Kalachakra Puja at Bodhgaya have another aspects to present that it stand with cosmopolitan prospects and accepts all the different cultures and peoples from the different parts of globe with the same vigor it had slicked to native fellow Tibetans who practices Buddhism.

The Kalachakra Puja at Bodhgaya: confluence of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Nationalism

The first ever Kalachakra puja in exile was organized in March 1970 at Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India; the seat of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Since 1954, His Holiness has given 34 Kalachakra Initiations, and Bodhgaya has hosted most number of Kalachakra puja including in December 1974, 1985, 2003, 2012 and 2017. The Kalachakra teachings in 2012 drew over 200,000 devotees from across the world, which include about 8,000-10,000 Tibetans from Tibet. More than 220,000 people in total gathered to participate in the ceremony. But it was not until 1984 when Buddhist followers emerged in more than Lakhs to learn and partake in the spiritual learning from the supreme spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism.

The Kalachakra Puja in Bodhgaya holds paramount importance among Tibetan-in-exiles. It is one of the largest spiritual gatherings of Buddhists worldwide as well as

Tibetans living in exile from all over the world, which undoubtedly helps to build nationalistic ambitions in the Tibetan people. Due to its sacredness and immense piousness of Bodhgaya simultaneously its capacity to host lakhs of practitioners makes it most attracting time of year for Tibetans to push through their limitation of nationalism and strengthen their voice for full independence of Tibet.

The Kalachakra Puja is the most significant initiation and ritual that supports the very goals of Tibetan nationalist aspirations. It provides a global platform where Buddhists from all over the world may recognize how an exile community has been preserving its culture and legacy while simultaneously accelerating its commitment to gaining complete independence for its motherland. As the center of the Tibetan exile population in Dharamsala, they have been working hard to raise their voice in favor of independence. Since their founding in exile, the CTA (Central Tibetan Administration) has organized a number of public Tibetan Buddhist rites in an effort to foster a sense of patriotism among Tibetans living abroad. Every year, lakhs of tourists, pilgrims, and visitors flock to Bodhgaya to pay their respects to Buddha, yet Tibetans are vehemently opposed to the spirituality of the city. They see it as the "global stage of attention" where the Kalachakra Puja is successfully performed by Tibetans in large numbers. On the other hand, Tibetans have been effective in using Bodhgaya and the Mahabodhi Shrine as symbols of their centuries-old Buddhism, whereas the Chinese have been rather inactive and uninterested in institutionalizing their Buddhist group in Bodhgaya.

Voice and methods

A genuine importance to the Kalachakra Puja in Bodhgaya is due to events that led severe protests by both Tibetans living in their motherland and Tibetans-in-exile. Bodhgaya has served as the most vibrant space where confluence of Buddhists ideals and application resonates. There came to be several Tibetan organization and NGOs which works tenuously to give strength to their campaign for complete independence to Tibet. The stage that Kalachakra Puja at Bodhgaya provides is similar to that of any multilateral forum in world may present to any of the distressed nation. Though, the Tibetan haven't been successful in making heard their side of cause at global institutions the way they would have wanted but still they never takes step behind.

Following the 2008 incidence of self-immolation in Tibet, Tibetans were enraged, with no other option to express their outrage but through rallies and campaigns. First in 2012 and again in 2017, the CTA and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama hosted Kalachakra Puja to give their people in exile a unified front of nationalist identity and full of its goals in order to move toward non-violent tactics of advocating for Tibet's independence. The regularity of Kalachakra puja events at Bodhgaya is indicative of the significance of expressing the aspirations of many Tibetan communities. They employ a variety of methods to express their displeasure with the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the aggressiveness implied by Chinese authorities in Tibet. The Chinese government has persistently called the Kalachakra Puja as "illegal", to their account this global religious congregation is a forum for undertaking divisive activities by the HH Dalai Lama.

During the 33rd Kalachakra puja held in 2012, devotees and followers from over 90 countries flocked to participate in this

global event. The Tibetan diaspora turned out in force for the event, as did Buddhists from across Asia dressed in bright regional costumes. More than 40,000 individuals arrived from the Himalayan regions, which include Bhutan, Ladakh, Nepal, and other places. Many Buddhists from within China have also attended the event in recent years; this time, there were about 2,200 attendees from Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland in addition to 8,500 from the West. Participants were seated on the ground beneath the large tent's blue and white ceiling, with designated spaces for each group. Overall the puja saw participation of over 200,000 devotees from across the world, which include about 8,000-10,000 Tibetans from Tibet mainland gathered to participate in the ceremony. China's decision to allow up to 10,000 Tibetan pilgrims to travel to India for the Kalachakra ritual reveals a strategic yet contradictory form of political control. While religious freedom inside Tibet remains severely restricted, the selective permission largely granted to elderly pilgrims from politically less volatile regions reflects Beijing's calculated confidence that exposure to the Dalai Lama and exile society would not translate into political mobilization. This policy underscores a paternalistic, colonial mindset of governance that underestimates Tibetan political consciousness, while inadvertently enabling the circulation of nationalist memory, religious authority, and alternative imaginaries of freedom beyond China's control.

Reigniting Collective National Sentiment

The 2012 puja saw more overt and structured ways to reinvigorate nationalism among Tibetans-in-exile by civil society organizations. 'The Student for a free Tibet' organized their cause by making their stall prominently decorated with the campaign posters and banners for the release of all political prisoners and activists inside the Tibet. 'The Gu Chu Sum Society for Tibetan Political Prisoners' also set up a tent with photos showing the severe methods of torture that PLA employs on Tibetan protesters and activists to create sense of fear among Tibetans globally. These efforts achieve their goals as pilgrims from Tibet passes through the exhibit every hour, studying the photos and taking books and pamphlets in English, Tibetan, and Chinese to understand the civilizational disaster their society were facing in another side of border. More than two dozen of NGOs set up information centers and fund-raising booths; the Tibetan Youth Congress was the most well-known.

The 34th Kalachakra initiation ceremony, held in Bodh Gaya during 2nd-14th January 2017, was attended by approximately 200,000 devotees from 92 countries, making the event unprecedented in its scale and impact. According to Tibetan and Indian media reports, China deployed over 1,000 spies at the event, while the Times of India (January 8, 2017) reported that Indian security agencies arrested several alleged Chinese agents planning to disrupt the Kalachakra and harm His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This fact highlights the profound political implications of this religious event. As a counter-effect of China's anti-Dalai Lama Campaigns following the 2008 Tibetan uprising, interest in Buddhism increased in China, resulting in a large number of Chinese Buddhists traveling to India to attend the Kalachakra. Bodh Gaya witnessed a vibrant public display of Tibetan culture alongside the daily Kalachakra teachings, with hotels, streets, and parks filled with Tibetan folk culture, clothing (chuba), music, art, and commerce. On January 9, a presentation

organized by the Tibetan Women's Association on the topic of "Tibet: The Third Pole and its Impact on Asia's Future" presented research, supported by photographic and video evidence, on the serious environmental consequences of China's developmental interventions on the 46,000 glaciers of the Tibetan Plateau and the ten major rivers of Asia. Plays staged by TIPA artists and the Gu-Chu-Sum Society publicized the repression faced by Tibetan political prisoners, monks, and nuns. On the final day, a 'Unity Concert' organized by a coalition of Tibetan musicians featured songs related to the freedom struggle performed in front of images of self-immolating monks. Thus, the Kalachakra ritual emerged as an international public sphere where Tibetan nationalism in exile was factually, visually, and institutionally reinforced through ritual, culture, media, NGO activities, and political memory.

The Department of Information and International Relations, CTA's Tibet Museum organized a picture exhibition during the initiation that served as a parallel site of political pedagogy inside a revered ritual venue. The exhibition, which was structured around topics including the life of the Dalai Lama, Tibet's modern history, and Tibetan self-immolation, turned a place of devotion into a platform for nationalist awareness. The exhibition integrated Tibetan political memory into the moral authority of the Kalachakra ritual by showcasing visual narratives of occupation, displacement, and nonviolent resistance to thousands of international followers. This intersection of ritual practice, visual culture, and historical storytelling exemplifies how Kalachakra assemblies serve as transnational venues for sustaining Tibetan nationalism in exile while transmitting political demands to a worldwide audience.

The surplus fund of approximately ₹30 millions (3 crore rupees) generated from the Kalachakra initiation ceremony and the overall financial management of ₹304.33 crore clearly underscored the administrative efficiency and moral legitimacy of the CTA in exile. The primary sources of resources for this event were donations from devotees (70%) and sponsorship contributions (29%), demonstrating the CTA's ability to translate religious faith into organized public finance. Under the guidance of the Gaden Phodrang office, the surplus funds were reallocated by the CTA to welfare projects, the monastic community, and local charities in Bodh Gaya. This process illustrates how rituals like the Kalachakra initiation transcend their religious function to serve as effective instruments of non-state governance, social responsibility, and administrative soft power.

The 34th edition of the Kalachakra teachings was a watershed point in re-establishing Tibetan identity in an era when many people around the world associate the community with Buddhism, whether that appraisal is correct or not. It transformed a sacred ceremony into a global public space. The Tibetan cause's moral credibility was strengthened by the presence of Tibetans who risked persecution to participate, and its political rhetoric was enhanced by widespread worldwide media coverage. The Kalachakra served as a means of administrative soft power, nonviolent mobilization, and symbolic legitimacy for the government structure of the Tibetan exile, going beyond devotion. The magnitude and variety of involvement highlighted the Kalachakra's role as a worldwide public forum in addition to its religious significance. Despite political dangers, the participation of Tibetans from within Tibet and the testimonies of

international devotees emphasized the ritual's symbolic resistance and moral authority.

Conclusion

Nationalism is something that has continued to work as motivation for the Tibetans living in exile. It does seem to be contrary to some modern writers and commentators that how such a small number of Tibetans who even not in their own native land would be able to prod towards complete independence for Tibet. Even though they are small in number and not in their motherland but there is that self-determination and non-violent path initiated by the HH the 14th Dalai Lama which motivates and leads to direction free Tibet.

The initiation to the Kalachakra takes everything into account: the body and the human mind, and the whole external aspect-cosmic and astrological and is spiritual in nature and supports a global initiative for welfare and peace. Beyond Buddhism, academic exposure to culture and ethnicity can inspire mindfulness and purposeful living while fostering a sense of community and embracing universal ideals like compassion and wisdom.

They acknowledge the fact that their identity of being sole representative of Tibetans heritage is can be safeguarded by the continued leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It is this astonishing contribution of His Holiness who nurtured the exile community to attain the heights of nation building even if they remain outside their motherland. The CTA never goes dormant and seldom missed any opportunity to kindle the common Tibetans to carry the baton for Tibetan full independence. The pro-activeness shown by the CTA and enthusiast Tibetans is keeping the nationalist vision for independence. The Kalachakra puja Bodhgaya has emerged as the cornerstone of international recognition to Tibetan Buddhism and its followers. This holy land of Buddhism haven't just enabled His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama to interact with its millions of Buddhist disciples in these years but also a place from where Tibetan community in exile reverberates its nationalism on the global platform. From establishing Tibetan sect of Buddhism in the Mahabodhi Temple to organizing the pious Kalachakra Puja; the nationalism of these Tibetans becomes inherent to engage global community in experiencing hardships community went through in decades.

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