INDEPENDENT TIBET

_Geographical Considerations_

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No two scholars or no two explorers would agree about the precise territorial limits of Tibet. This would be as much true in 1900-07 when both British and Russians were determined to keep the other power out of Tibet as of 1951-54 when China finally incorporated Tibet into the fold of the Great Han Motherland and made considerable changes in the eastern and northern parts of what was once Tibet. Besides no definition of Tibet could be satisfactory both for the anthropologist and the philologist.

For Tibet in the first half of this century a British military report of 1910 may be quoted: "Tibet lies in the heart of the Asiatic Continent, and extends, roughly from the 79th to the 103rd degree of east longitude, and from the 28th to the 37th degree of north latitude. It is bounded on the north and east by the Chinese provinces of Turkestan, Mongolia, Kan-su, Shu-chuan, and Yunnan; and on the south and west by the British territories or dependencies of Assam, Bhutan, Sikim, Nepal, British Garhwal, Tehri Garhwal, Bashahr, Kargil, and Kashmir. It will thus be seen that Great Britain and China are the only two countries whose territories are contiguous with those of Tibet."

"The actual boundaries of Tibet, especially to the north and east, are ill-defined and frequently non-existent. It is therefore difficult to estimate the area of the country with any exactitude, but, including all the country south of the Alitun Tagh and Nan Shan mountains, it may be taken as some 600,000 square miles, and may be said to approximate to the area of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Bengal, the United Provinces, the Punjab, and Bombay, put together." [The Indian provinces named here were as in 1910.]

In a well-known Tibetan geographical work composed in 1820 by a Mongol scholar, Bla-ma Bitan-po, occurs the following description of Tibet:

"Fitrung roughly north and north east of the country of India or bordering on the north from Banga-la is the country of Tibet.... The country of Tibet is the region of himavat which is the land converted by Avalokitesvara. That country (himavat) is much higher than the other surrounding countries. It is a region, where both in summer and winter, the heat and cold are minimized, and the fear of famine, beasts of prey, poisonous serpents, poisonous insects, heat and cold are not great.

"(Besides) the snow-mountains and other mountains these are great lakes of clear cool sparkling water in many sections of the country. And various rivers and tributaries, which possess the eight qualities of water..."

This article presents the author's lecture at Calcutta University on 1st July 1977. A synopsis of the author’s three lectures entitled "India and Tibet—a study in interdependence" is appended at the end.

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"There are a great many forests, grassy regions, and alpine meadows there, and although the arable fields and summer pastures are not large in size, there are no desert plains or saline regions".

Several points in the above description may be noticed. Tibet is located as India's neighbour; India as the Land of Enlightenment is not only the most coveted neighbour but forms also Tibet's high way to the Mahasiddhas. Bodhissattva Avalokitesvara is, in Tibetan legend, credited with having be-gotten the man in Tibet, and also credited with converting Tibet into Dharmas through incarnations beginning with King Songtsen Gampo. Later when the Tibetan monarchy collapsed incarnations of Avalokitesvara came to rule Tibet; these incarnations are the Dalai Lamas of Tibet.

The references to temperate climate, grassy regions, arable fields and absence of famine do reflect facets of a highland with sparse population, and significantly enough there is little reference to mines and minerals, which were not unknown. Besides for a Mongolian, with experience of cold in Mongolia and north China and of heat in north India, climate of Tibet was an ideal one. Most important than mines and minerals were the food crops: barley, wheat, buck wheat, maize, millet, oats, peas and even rice. Snow mountains, great lakes and mighty rivers indeed made Tibet a happy land. An ancient hyponotes Tibet as "The centre of snow mountains; the source of great rivers; a lofty country and a pure land".

II

As the source of great rivers, Tibet, more than any other country, has shaped the history of Asia; it will be fair to describe both India and China as gifts par excellence of the rivers of Tibet. Appropriately much of this paper on 'Geographical Considerations' may be devoted to the rivers of Tibet. These are: the Indus, the Sub, the Gogra or Karna—an affluent of the Ganges, the Tsiang-po or Brahmaputra, the Wnc Ho or Yellow River, the Yangtze Kiang, the Mekong and the Salwen. If the Himalayan and Trans-Himalayan affluents of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, the eastern Tibetan affluents of the Yangtze Kiang, and the inland rivers of the Kun Lun and the Chang Tschang are added, Tibet may be counted as the biggest and the most potential hydrographic entity in Asia. The major rivers may be described here. What are the major rivers of Tibet?

In Tibetan imagery, built upon ancient Buddhist lore, the major rivers of Tibet are those that originated in the Kailas-Manassaravar region and flowed over the Himalayas through the Aryabhami into the high areas. Traditionally four rivers of India are thus associated with snow cliffs of glacial cones which once looked like animal heads from distance. There are several versions of these 'animal heads' and the streams turning out of the 'animal mouths'. The Lhais version may be presented here. The Tashok Khabab (Falls from the Horse's mouth) flows eastward, joins the Kyaslu Kiang south of Lhasa—and ultimately becomes the Brahmaputra in Assam and Bengal. The Langche Khabab (Falls from the Elephant's mouth) flows southward to become the Sutlej in the Punjab. The Magapa Khabab (Falls from the Peacock's Mouth) flows south west and becomes the holy Gang when it reaches Haridwar. The Smengy Khabab (Falls from the Lion's Mouth) flows west and becomes Sindhu in Kashmir, and its estuary is called Sindh.
Tibetan theory about the Ganges originating in the catchments of Kailas-Manasarovar is not merely based on the Sanskrit abhidharmakosa or earlier Pali records. Even as late as the second half of the eighteenth century Tibetan pilgrims and merchants are known to have seen the 'animal head' out of which streamed forth the Ganges. Choje Pa-trul and Lama Tsempo record from hearsay as in ancient tradition as well as from knowledge of pilgrims and other on-the-spot observers. While orthodox Hindus, in both north and south India, would locate this last source of the Ganges in a sub-trimaran glacier connecting with Gangotri glacier, more modern minds would straightforwardly reject the story of the Tibetan origins of the Ganges as a myth. As one humbly claiming to know both the soil and the soul of Tibet, this author would only refer to the peculiarities of the Roof of the World. In Tibet mountains have been rising; depressions have been sinking; lakes, rivers and glaciers have been shifting—and all these even in the historic past within one millennium.

Glacial icefields on the south of the Kailas Mountains are known to have changed very much in dimensions and directions; the great Tshang near Thara in the mid-17th century provides today the hard landing ground for the heaviest jetties. It is thus no wonder that the ancient source of the Ganges is lost today due to diverse and simultaneous processes of dessication, erosion, winds and tectonics.

Under compulsion of events the Hindu pilgrims for Jumukshiki had to set up a temple in Kangra; likewise a Mount Kailas and a Lake Manas had to be found on the southern slopes of the Himalayas; Sankarshana is known to have sanctified the Bodhrinnath Temple in place of that near Tholing on the northern slopes of the Himalayas. So when a relentless Nature dried up or buried the first fountain head, the Hindus found the Gangotri as equally hazardous spot for pilgrimage.

It is relevant to point out that unlike Sindhu, Satadru and Brahmaputra, the form Ganga is not of pure or true Indus origin. The word is not known in Vedic period and modern scholars have justifiably traced it to Tibetan, Burman dialect. In Tibetan language the river is celebrated as Ganga, and it is derived from terms Gangi (snow mountain) and Bummo (Daughter). That perhaps exalts the name in favour of Ganga's Tibetan origins.

A major river, in Tibetan tradition, is not necessarily a mighty river as understood in modern terms. What makes a river major in Tibet is its source and the sacred fountain head for major rivers is Kailas-Manasarovar. Thus in ancient times when the Guss and the Sita rivers—or their principal affluents—streamed out of the Kailas range, these came to be ranked as major rivers. The rivers, Hwang Ho and Yangtse Kiang, Mekong and Salween are pushing back their sources ever further westward and this process has been noticed by the Tibetans and Bamu elements in eastern Tibet during the last one hundred years or a little more.

In India—till the neighbours on the west and the east claimed share
over the waters of the Sindhu, the Gandā and the Brahmaputra—there was no interest in the origins of the rivers; in China from the time of Emperor Chien Lung a systematic probe into the headwaters of the Hwang Ho and Yangtse Kung has been carried out on a national scale. The Han colonial pressure in eastern Tibet, both in the north and south, has been a movement of rise-rising population crowding along the river banks. Thus by the second quarter of the twentieth century the Kekonor region, where the present Dalai Lama was born (1935), was a Han dominated area where the only language taught in the schools was Chinese.

With the events of 1950-51 when the People’s Republic of China completed the occupation of the entire highlands stretching from 10° degree to 79° degree east longitude, Chinese scientists made a thorough probe into hydrography of what they called the Tibet Region of China and arrived at the following conclusions.

‘In the course of the centuries the immense energy of the rivers in Tibet has gone to waste. Only in a few places have the Tibetans adapted it for the turning of millstones powered by water wheels. Possessing huge reserves of power, the Tibetan rivers in the very near future, as the economy is developed in the Chinese People’s Republic, including development in Tibet itself, can be used for the production of electric power. A scientific expedition conducting research in Tibet in 1951-53 searched out and estimated the available reserves of hydro-electric power. The Tsangpo attracted the special attention of the researchers, being in the basin of this river that the economic life of Tibet is concentrated. According to preliminary calculations, the Tsangpo in its middle and lower course can produce 62 million kilowatt hours of electric power. The best prospects of the Tsangpo are two sectors where the river flows in narrows and where it carries large volumes of water and has its maximum energy. The first sector—Yarchey—is situated somewhat to the west of the city of Chushul (Tyosu浩). The discharge of water at low water is here equal to 57.5 cubic meters per second. For a distance of 20 kilometres the slope of the river is almost 90 meters. The Tsangpo possesses still greater power: on an average the discharge is 100 cubic meters per second and the slope in a distance of 48 kilometres is 220 meters. Above these sectors are situated broad sections of valley which can be utilized perfectly as natural reservoirs. Further to the east at the bend of the Tsangpo (the Bomu Region) conditions for the construction of a hydro-electric station are still more favorable since the climate becomes moister, more moderate and warmer, the velocity of flow and the level of water in the river become more stable. For the development of electric power in Tibet the upper courses of the Salween, Mekong and Yangtse Rivers will also take on significance. They are separated by narrow water divides where there are eight suitable sites, which together with one tributary, the Botys-Tszaamb, possess according to preliminary data, a total complex of power of 1,070,460 horsepower. Three sites have a power potential between 30,000–50,000 horsepower, three between 70,000-100,000 horsepow, one—130,000 horsepow, one 360,000 horsepower and the Botys-Tszaamb has 15 such sites with a total power of 130,000 horsepower.’

The above estimate represents the minimum expectations as the development projects and river training projects during the last twenty years have yielded further potentials. The point for interest in any discussion about
“India and Tibet” is simply this: if the course of Tsangpo (as Brahmaputra is called in Tibet), particularly through the sharp bends and steep gorges in Kongpo, is in the hands of scientists and technologists hostile to India the prospects for India will be indeed gloomy.

III

A grateful imagination of the ancient peoples in the Indo-Gangetic plains had fixed the fountain head of all the gifts of good living in Mount Sumeru in far north. Chinese Buddhists cosmography would locate Mount Sumeru somewhere along the Kun Lun Mountains. Tibetan tradition would make a more precise identification viz Mount Kailas. Scholars and scientists of modern India should wake up to the historical significance of the mythical mountain.

Scholars and scientists of modern India should also note with gratitude that while, in the medieval times and till the British conquest, our intelligence had but vague notions of India’s power or Indiaanness, Tibetan intelligentsia—mostly scholars—merchants and officials—had a fine sense of India as a great country and as one country. And this was shared by even the illiterate peasants and nomads.

Two countries loomed large in the imagination of all Tibetans. These were China and India, both great in extent, width or size; sga or Gya. China was designated Gyang (gya-nag), that is, a great country where people dressed in black; India was designated Gyagar (gya-gar), that is, a great country where people dressed in white and where people’s food was mostly white, that is, rice, sugar and vegetarian dishes.

An homoeoid description for India was Phagul (phags-pa’), that is, Aranyadeha, Noble Land or Land of Enlightenmen. Another description, Phagthung (phags-khrugs) or Restplace of the Holy Ones, stretches this Land of Enlightenmen much beyond Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Varanasi and Kusinagara and covers the entire sub-continent from Kashmir to Kanchipuram and from Gandhara to Kamarupa.

For Buddhists and Bodhisattvas had blessed all parts of Janaevayupa. Buddha Sakyamuni was born in Kapilavustu; Asoka was born in Magadha, Kaniukra ruled in Kashmir and Punjab; Nagarjun came from Andhragadhesha; Aryadeva came from Sinhala; Asanga and Vasubandhu were tutors of Bharhuapura; Dignaga was from Kanchipuram; Dharmakirti was born in Trimalapura; Guru Padmagambhav, born in Suvastu, had visited the Kamarupa Lohit region; the first monastery of Tibet, Semye or Ashvinya, was named after the Aj ritual in Maharashtra. These and hundred other facts, a modern Indian would learn in the monasteries of Tibet if this author did two decades ago. It was also learned that Gyagar Key (gya-gar-skad) or the Language of India was Sanskrit.

Earthquakes are frequent in Tibet and Tibetans live with earthquakes but would associate unusual occurrences with tragedies at home. An intense earthquake occurred in Lhasa on 15 August 1947; no less than 40 individual shocks were heard and houses rocked and rumbled. That was Tibet’s protest against the disruption of the age-old unity of the Land of Enlightenmen.
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INDIA AND TIBET

—A STUDY IN INTERDEPENDENCE—

SYNOPSIS

The theme will be presented in three lectures under the captions: (1) India and Tibet—Geographical Considerations; (2) India and Tibet—Historical Considerations; and (3) India and Tibet—Material Considerations.

The first lecture presents the theme of India and Tibet being a geographical unit, a unit of physical interdependence; India being more at the receiving end than Tibet. The second lecture presents the fact of India and Tibet in the past being in the same world of cultural, moral and spiritual values; Tibet being more at the receiving end than India. The third and concluding lecture contends that neither India nor Tibet could afford to have a hostile, indifferent or non-cooperation neighbour. Both for economic considerations and security reasons, Tibet and India have to cultivate active mutual aid in the race for survival.

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The expressions India and Tibet in these three lectures would generally refer to the two geographical entities as known till the middle of this century. For India the terminal date is 1947 and for Tibet the terminal date is 1951. India and Tibet are, in these lectures, by and large, terms of human and cultural geography and either expression (India or Tibet) stands more for the soul of a people than for the soil of a country. The three lectures in totality, however, trace the inter-relationship between the matter and the spirit.

The pioneer scholars and leading authorities whose works are being drawn upon are listed at the end of each lecture. Specific and detailed references to their works and publications are not made for the simple reason that the author has weighed fully the data provided by these pioneers and authorities with his own findings and therefore this author takes full responsibility for the facts stated and the opinions expressed in these three lectures. This responsibility is entirely personal or individual on the part of this author and no office or institution with which this author is or was ever connected should in any way be associated with the facts and opinions expressed in these lectures. NCS 19.7.77