



## **Leadership Transition in China, Self-Immolation in Tibet the conundrum for India**

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The main theme of this presentation was to bring in to light leadership transition in China and its impact on Tibet. While doing so, the speaker broadened his focus to self-immolations and protests in Tibet and India-Tibet relations from a very different perspective. Here the speaker was not looking at whether India was important to Tibet or not or what help India did to Tibet in the past, instead of it his focus is on why Tibet matters to India, why should Indians realise that Tibet or Tibetans are also important for India. The speaker finds a gap in the existing literature on Tibet, while writing this paper. He held that scholarship in China on Tibet is guided by Sino-phobia and scholarship in India is guided either by China threat or by pro-China attitude. The speaker feels that scholarship should go beyond the boundary of narrow nationalism; it should not be confined to India's perception on China or China's perception on India. One crucial argument made by the speaker in this context was scholars should look from the point of view of Indians, Chinese and Tibetans in the complicated system of nation state.

The speaker started his presentation with leadership transition in China. He argued that Chinese role in Tibet does not depend upon leadership; idea, ideology and interest always play a structural role in this regard. Chinese nationalism is the main ideology behind Chinese claim on Tibet. He said that China controls Tibet not because Communist Party of China wants to control Tibet; it is because of Chinese nationalism that sees Tibet as a part of China. Another interesting point made by the speaker was that Tibet has not always been a part of Chinese nationalism; it was with the evolution of Chinese nationalism that gradually Tibet became a part of it. The speaker gave a brief history of Chinese nationalism. In 1980, Chinese nationalism was dominated by Han Chauvinism, which did not include Tibet and neither did it include Manchus and Mongols. However later, Chinese nationalism came under the grasp of Qing Empire's notion of Chinese nation, which includes Tibet as a part of Chinese Nation. Here, he made a general observation that big Asian nations had a tendency to impose their will to smaller nations, they did not ask smaller nations whether they want to become a part of them or not. In this sense both China and India were similar; he gave the example of Kashmiris in India and Uyghurs in China.

Then the speaker moved on to the issue of ideology of Communist Party of China. The limitation he found with regard to the ideology of Communist Party is the idea of "liberation". Communist party thought that they had the responsibility to liberate everything, not only themselves but others too. According to the speaker, the flaws come here and this brings a commonality between imperialist ideology and communist ideology. This is not only true for Chinese Communist Party but for all the

Communist parties. The speaker drew a line between the idea of liberation and serf emancipation campaign in Tibet in 2009. He thought that while accommodating Tibetans, CCP did not want to leave the idea of liberation. He then gave a background of the serf emancipation campaign. It was celebrated after the large-scale protest in Tibet in 2008 because CCP felt that Tibetans were needed to be emancipated from feudalism. In this regard, the speaker stressed that all through CCP had been more bureaucratized than Mao and Deng period yet CCP is the most conservative party of the world today.

The presentation proceeded to the matter of how interest groups in China are also related to Sino-Tibet relation. Among the many interest group People's Liberation Army of China is one of the main. If Tibet will get even at least some kind of autonomy then PLA has to reduce their presence in Tibet, which automatically led to reduction of budget. In this regard, the speaker noted that conflicts are actually moneymaking business. He again mentioned some differences existed between some departments of PRC dealing with Tibet. For example, State Council Information Office does not criticise Dalai Lama as much as United Front Work Department do. Therefore, the speaker found that different political and bureaucratic interest led to the status quo being maintained. The geo-political issue was also related to Sino-Tibet relation. Chinese part thought that if Dalai Lama had not internationalised the issue in 1980s then things would have been different. The speaker highlighted the fact that negotiation from the side of China came out only when international pressure was there. To support his argument he gave the example of Xinjiang.

The speaker then came to the second part of the presentation i.e. self-immolation in Tibet. He started with saying that self-immolation was part of a wider resistance movement against China. In this context, he thought that one had to look at the evolution of Tibetan nationalism. Regarding the Tibetan nationalism, he thought that China played the role of catalyst. The main reason for self-immolation according to the speaker was Tibetans who were not happy with Dalai Lama's political approach (middle way approach) and at the same time, they did not want to protest against him. Because of this dilemma the process of self-immolation started. He thought that it was not possible for self-immolation to be successful as long as Chinese role in Tibet depend upon legitimacy of Han Chinese. About the leadership in Tibet, the speaker thought that a dangerous trend was evolving there, which was political leaders were now using Dalai Lama's name to criticise policies of Government in Exile.

The third part of the presentation dealt with India's stand in Tibet. The speaker noticed a change in Indian policy maker's attitude towards Tibet since the time of Jawaharlal Nehru. He felt that Nehru's humanitarian approach was missing in contemporary times. He also found lack of a coherent approach from India toward Tibet. He mentioned the existence of three types of view on Tibet. First one came from the military background, which thought Tibet was a strategic asset. Second view felt that Tibet was a liability and a third view thought that Tibetans should be grateful to India's genuine help, which was not true according to the speaker. The speaker argued that Indian government should also be grateful to Tibetans. In this regard, he mentioned about Tibetans engagement with the Indian military, which was not publically recognised by Indian Government. He also pointed out how it was difficult for Tibetans to get Indian Citizenship. Strikingly the speaker argued that if it came to increasing relation with China, relation with Tibet always went to back foot. Finally, the speaker ended with saying it was in the interest of India and China that position of Tibet always remained status quo.

Some participants had different opinion with regard to the India's role in Tibet from the speaker. One participant argued that Tibetan's can apply for Indian Citizenship based on naturalization and there was no discrimination of rights among citizens of Indian, which was applicable to those Tibetans who were now Indian citizen. Another participant argued that in case of Tibetans involvement with the Indian military, India had separate arrangement for them and the term discrimination did not apply here. In

reply to these arguments, the speaker brought the issue of Karmapa. To justify his own argument he said that how Tibetan religious leaders were deprived of right to move freely throughout India, when it was enjoyed by any other Indian religious leader. In this regard, one participant clarified that Karmapa issue was Tibet's internal matter and India did not have anything to do.

In reply to a question of process of democratization in Tibet, the speaker held that the role of religious leaders may be a challenge to democratisation process, but we cannot deny the fact that international support in Tibet also came through the religious leaders only.

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