

SECOND REPORT-TIBET

1949

by Maj ZC Bakshi

(from National Archive of India)

1. Political situation

The late Dalai Lama (Thirteenth) was a man of progressive ideas. This may have been due to the fact that he had lived in INDIA for a few years. For the first time in TIBET's history he took 3 cars (carried in parts) to LHASA from INDIA. He built a special road between the POTALA and NORBULINGKA for these cars. He encouraged the officials to buy motor cycles. He electrified his palaces and LHASA city. He arranged to send some army officers to QUETTA and SHILLONG for training. He sent 4 boys to England for higher education. The other lamas were opposed to all this. But the late Dalai Lama was a very strong man who did not take much notice of opposition. When he died, a very young lama became the Regent and although he was also a man of progressive ideas, he found himself helpless against the other lamas. The cars and the motor cycles were locked up and the owners ordered not to use them. The trained army officers were removed from the army and given civil appointments. A general reaction started. All the favourites of the late Dalai Lama were removed from their appointments and demoted. But as time went on the young Regent gained more and more experience and became quite strong. The other influential lamas were very suspicious of his progressive ideas. They, therefore, advised him to go into seclusion for three years as otherwise great misfortune was likely to fall on him. The Regent decided to go and he

thought that the best man who could officiate in his temporary absence was his own Guru. So after handing over the Government to his Guru he went to some secluded place for praying and meditation. At the end of three years he returned to LHASA. But when he asked his Guru to hand him back the Government, he was locked up in the POTALA by the Guru. All his favourites were demoted and disgraced. He died in prison under mysterious circumstances. The Guru is still the Regent. He is very old and is opposed to any type of reform. He is very unpopular and is dreaded by other officials. But he is firmly established. He will remain Regent till he dies. The cabinet consists of KALING LAMA, SURKANG SHAPPE and RAGASHAR. KALING LAMA has been a minister for a very long time. He is NOT very intelligent and is against all reforms. The next senior is SURKANG SHAPPE, the son of SURKHANG DZASA, the Foreign Secretary. He is the most intelligent minister and has progressive ideas. He became a minister about four years ago by heavily bribing the Regent. His chief aim in becoming a minister was to make money. He is clever enough to realize that he must never come out in the open with his progressive ideas. RAGA SHAR became a minister last month. He was C-in-C before this. He is not so intelligent and looks very unimpressive. He is a quiet member of the cabinet. The lamas and all the officials from the lowest to the senior most ministers seem to be worried about the recent success of the Communists in CHINA. Everywhere we went and every official and lama we met, asked us the same question "What news about the Communists". I was told by the C-in-C that the Chinese Communists were building roads and aerodromes in SINKIANG. But this fear of Chinese Communists does not spur them to much action. A religious ceremony was being performed by the lamas in LHASA to ward off the evils. The abbots of DREPHUNG monastery said that the best they could do to keep the Chinese Communists away was to perform this religious ceremony!

2. Political Parties

There are no political parties as such in TIBET. Neither is there any likelihood of the formation of such parties in the near future- as such a move will be considered nothing less than an open rebellion against the Government. In TIBET no person can oppose those who are in authority. Even those who differ are severely punished.

3. Is the Government firmly established

It is difficult to say whether the Government is firmly established and has absolute support of the people. To understand this one has to study the structure of the Tibetan Society and also the system of the Government.

The Society can be broadly divided in three classes; lamas, ruling class and the poor. Lamas form 1/3 of the total population. It is generally believed that one can enter heaven only through a lama. For this reason lamas have got a strong hold on the population. The interests of the ruling classes are identical to those of the lamas. All the officials are either lamas or from the ruling class. The land, nearly the whole of which belongs to the Government, is given only to these two classes.

The poor are not at all associated with the Government. They can neither hold any official position in the Government nor do they possess any land. They work for their land-lords and are completely dependent on them. They are badly exploited by the lamas as well as the ruling classes.

The Dalai Lama is the spiritual head as well as the King. When he is a minor, the Government is in the hands of a Regent who is also a lama. There is a cabinet of three to four ministers who are appointed by the Dalai Lama. The ministers do not hold separate portfolios. They all sit together and give their decisions on questions brought up before them.

There is no written law. The officials can award any punishment they like to the accused. The most common punishment is to clip off the ears of

the accused. It is, therefore, not surprising that the poor people dread the officials and always obey them. A Government which is in the hands of a certain class and which has got absolute powers over it the people should normally be difficult to disrupt. But/is certain that when such a structure is shaken at the top by any outside power, the people will rise against the Government. The intelligent Tibetan officials are afraid that the masses will join the Communists and rise against them if they feel that the Communists are strong enough to throw away the present Government.

4. Chinese influence

For years the Chinese officials in LHASA have looked down upon the Tibetan officials and civilians and have openly said that the Tibetans were barbarious. The Tibetans strongly resented this and hated the Chinese. There is no influential Tibetan official who is pre-Chinese especially now when CHINA has turned Communists. All the Chinese except a few business men in LHASA, have been turned out of TIBET. Even the use of some of the favourite Chinese dishes like sea slugs has been banned.

5. Attitude towards INDIA

The members of the INDIAN Mission at LHASA have always treated the Tibetan officials with respect and maintained very friendly relations with them. As a result the Tibetans have developed a special regard for Indians. In my opinion the Tibetans were a bit suspicious of the British and other Europeans. But with Indians they are quite frank. There is, however, one important question which has created some doubt in the minds of some of the Tibetan officials. Our failure to supply all the arms and ammunition which the Tibetan Government had asked for is being viewed with suspicion.

6. Economic and industrial resources

TIBET is an agriculturist country. Sufficient barley to feed the whole population is grown in the country. Rice and peas are also grown, though in very small quantities, in certain parts of the country. The Government maintain reserve stocks of barley in LHASA, GYANTSE, SHIGATSE and eastern TIBET. Wool is the main export. Most of it is sent to KALIMPONG and GANGTOK. Some wool is used in making carpets. These are also exported to INDIA.

Gold is extracted in eastern TIBET but not in considerable quantity. It is believed that a large number of other minerals can also be extracted. But there is a religious belief against extracting minerals from the earth.

7. Population

Though no exact figures are available, it is estimated that the population numbers between one and three millions inhabiting an area not far short of one million square miles. 1/3 of the total male population consists of lamas. There is wide spread polyandry and usually all the brothers in a family share one wife. The lamas do not marry. Most of the girls therefore cannot get married and are forced to become nuns. This is the cause of a low rate of birth in TIBET.

Nearly two-thirds of Northern and Western TIBET consists of high mountains and plateau country at an altitude of well over 11000 ft. this area is very sparsely populated by a people who live a primitive and nomadic life. The remainder of TIBET can be divided in two natural divisions. First, the tracts containing the upper valley of the INDUS, SUTLEJ and BRAHMAPUTRA. This area slopes gradually from West to East, and the lower parts are more populous. The valley of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries contains the three largest town of TIBET: LHASA (about 50,000), SHIGATSE (about 20,000) and GYANTSE (about 10,000).

The second division is the system of mountains and rivers of East TIBET. The southern parts of this division get greater rain fall and are wooded. This is the most thickly populated area of TIBET.

The desert and mountain barriers which isolate TIBET from its neighbours have preserved there unique way of life. The Tibetans are strong hardy people who look cheerful even amidst so many hardships. They are very hardworking and have a tremendous stamina. They have natural love for arms.

8. Personalities in the Army

(i) DZASA KESANG TSULTRIM

A small, unimpressive but cheerful man who has been Monk C-in-C for nearly nine years now. He seems to have great confidence in the fighting qualities of the Tibetan soldiers and is of the opinion that man to man the Tibetan soldier will always beat the Chinese soldier.

(ii) DZASA KUNSANG-TSE

A tough and aggressive looking man who was appointed lay C-in-C in October 1949. He was a salt tea tax officer before becoming C-in-C. He has also been a Depien (Bn Comd) for some time in Eastern TIBET. Intelligence persons regretted his appointment as C-in-C at this critical moment due to his lack of influence in the army. He succeeded RAGA SHAR who has been appointed a minister now.

(iii) YUTHOK DZASA

A strong, well built and intelligent man who is very influential in LHASA. He received training in QUETTA and SHILLONG. A man of progressive ideas who wants the army to be well equipped and well trained. He is himself a good gunner. He is NOT in the Army now and is holding a civil appointment in LHASA. He has refused repeated offers to become a

minister as he wants to keep out of the intrigues of the other cabinet ministers. He can speak Hindustani.

(iv) TERRING LACHAG

Educated at St. Paul School, DARJEELING. He was trained by Indian Army instructors at GYANTSE. He is believed to be the best gunner in TIBET. Speaks good English and Hindustani. Is now holding a civil appointment. I could NOT meet him as he was NOT in LHASA.

(v) TSARONG SHAPPE

A strong, well built intelligent man who joined the Army as a sepoy. He fought well against the Chinese and became a favourite of the late Dalai Lama who later appointed him C-in-C. The Dalai Lama married him to a very rich heiress. He became very influential and was appointed a cabinet minister. His popularity and influence increased so much that the Dalai Lama himself became jealous of him and demoted him to second rank (DZASA). TSARONG SHAPPE now is the Mint Officer. He has been offered cabinet post repeatedly by the present regime. But he has always refused such offers. He has been to MONGOLIA, CHINA, JAPAN and INDIA. He is a man of the most progressive ideas in TIBET. He controls most of the trade with INDIA and is the richest man in TIBET (excluding Dalai Lama who is not a man but the incarnation of GOD). He wants TIBET to establish trade with America and European countries. It is believed that he had asked LOWEL THOMAS, the American radio commentator to bring to the notice of American businessmen the tremendous opportunities for trade in TIBET.

9. Communist propaganda and infiltration

As I have said before, in TIBET no one can utter a word against the Government. I do NOT think that there are many people in TIBET who know what Communism is. And these who know a little about it are the Lamas and the ruling class. These people are strictly against Communism. As long as

the present system of government remains, there can be no possibility of any Communist propaganda. So far the Communists have not succeeded in infiltrating anywhere in TIBET.

15. Recommendation:

With the establishment of a Communist Government in CHINA, the security of TIBET has been gravely endangered. There seems little doubt that sooner or later the Chinese Communists will invade TIBET. In fact their leaders have already declared that they intend to liberate TIBET which according to them belongs to CHINA. INDIA has got nearly 600 miles of common frontier with TIBET. The occupation or domination of TIBET by a potentially hostile power constitutes a grave threat to the security of INDIA. It is, therefore, important that we must watch the events closely and keep ourselves fully informed about the latest situation in TIBET. But at present we have got no source which can give our Defence Services infm [information] which may be of vital interest to them. There can be two methods by which we can establish such a source. First, by keeping an army officer in LHASA. As things are at present this can be ruled out as the Tibetan Government will NOT agree to it. Second, by transferring a suitable army officer to the Foreign Service and posting him to the INDIAN Mission in LHASA. Even if we remain neutral and the Chinese Communists occupy LHASA, this officer can keep us informed of the latest op [operation] situation. He can report tp [troop] conc [concentration] and move, constr [construction] of rds [roads] and air fds [air fields], reported intentions of the Communists and a lot of other infm of a military nature. I do NOT think that the Chinese will turn him out of LHASA. The INDIAN Mission has been functioning in LHASA for the past 10 years side by side with the Chinese Mission. If this proposal is accepted, the matter should be taken up with the Foreign Affairs Ministry at a high level as soon as possible as Mr.

RICHARDSON who is at present the head of the Mission is due to retire next year.