

Tibetan Muslims Settled in Kashmir: A Socio- Cultural Study

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Historical Perspective

Right upto the year 1950, Tibet had been a world in itself and by itself. This country was a sovereign entity, as it was independent, not only in socio-economic but also in a political sense[1]. The Tibetans had developed a system of government, hitherto unknown to the world, a government in which religion and politics ran parallel to one another, without conflict of any kind[2]. During the period from 1911 to 1949, Tibet enjoyed virtual independence. From 1949, after the Chinese interference, things changed. After the communist victory in China in 1949, the new political Republic sought to establish an increasing control over Tibet. On 23 May 1951, a completely new ideology of Marxism-Leninism was introduced. In May 1955, the Chinese government launched a move, introducing secular education on a large scale. Marxism and Leninism formed an important part of the syllabus[3]. In 1959, Tibetans made a revolt against the Chinese government, with 10,000 casualties[4]. 87,000 persons were executed in 1960, in Tibet alone[5]. The Chinese gained complete military control over the country in mid 1960s[6]. In 1965, it was finally incorporated into the People's Republic of China, as an autonomous region[7]. The move to absorb Tibet into China started with an assault on religion along the Marxist-Leninist line[8].

Tibetans were compelled either to accept the Marxist ideology or flee the country. In these circumstances, there was only one way open for the people of Tibet who were averse to the Chinese dominance, that is, to leave the country as they were neither prepared to accept the Chinese ideology nor had the strength to match the brute force employed by the Chinese to cow them down. Therefore, it became essential for Dalai Lama to leave the country along with his followers.

After Dalai Lama's flight to India, a vigorous policy of secularization started, through which both the monasteries and the lay nobility lost all their former jurisdiction[9]. Thousands of Tibetan refugees in pitiful condition began crossing over to India and neighbouring countries, through all possible routes. About 100,000 Tibetan refugees were reported to have settled all over the world, mostly in India[10]. According to one estimate, there were 4000 Tibetan refugees in Bhutan, 5000 in Sikkim, 7000 in Nepal and 60,000 in India[11].

A large group of these refugees had settled in Delhi, Himachal Pradesh and in other parts of India. In 1961, 120 Muslim families, who traced their ancestry to Kashmir, migrated to Kashmir, and settled at Srinagar[12]. In this regard, Arnold writes: "Islam had been carried into Tibet proper by Kashmiri merchants. Their settlements were found in all the chief cities of Tibet. They had Tibetan wives[13]. It has been agreed that the Kashmiri Muslims were residing in Tibet since the 17th

century[14]. It was on the basis of their Kashmiri origin that the then Prime Minister of India, Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, requested the communist China for allowing the migration of these people to Kashmir[15]. It is reported that 90% of the Tibetan Muslim refugees of Kashmiri origin settled in Kashmir, Saudi Arabia and Darjeeling[16].

Settlement

The immigrant Muslims to Kashmir, as reported, comprised of 120 families. On their arrival in Kashmir, they were sheltered in Srinagar, at Idd Gah ground. Later, three buildings were constructed for their permanent residence, there. Each building consisted of 40-two room sets, one for each family. Due to population increase in succeeding years, from 700 persons in 1961 to 2010 in 1993, the accommodation became insufficient for their needs. With the collective efforts of these people and their organisation, Tibetan Muslims Welfare Association, they were able to secure land and construct houses. This new settlement is located at Sangeen Darwaza, Hawal Srinagar, just at a distance of one and a half kilometre from the Idd Gah settlement. It comprises of 125 sets; each set having been constructed on a plot of land measuring 1300 sq. ft. This land had been allotted to them on lease basis, at an annual rent of Rs. 130 per square foot. The houses have been constructed by loan provided by the state government. Each house consists of 4 rooms with a bathroom.

Family

A Tibetan Muslim family may be defined as a group of two or more persons, who are husband, wife and their unmarried children. The family is nuclear in nature. The basic cause of their opting for nuclear family is the non-availability of adequate accommodation. Soon after a man gets married, he disintegrates from the parent family and sets up his independent household. They may occupy a separate house or a room in the same house in which the parents live, but they no more remain economically interdependent and have a separate kitchen. In one way, the family is extended in character. The married sons, though having independent family, have the informal influence of their parents: particularly of the father. In the total population of 200 families, all the families were found nuclear in structure. However, one family claimed to be joint, but when further enquiries were made, it was found to be nuclear for all practical purposes. The members of this family reside in different parts of the country throughout the year, barring some months. All the families there are patrilocal in form but there is no taboo against matrilocal family. Family, among these people, is a functional unit as well. It, in addition to fulfilling the economic needs of its members, is also a training centre for them. Girls learn the art of knitting, which forms a considerable part of the family income. Male members in most cases, follow the occupation of their elders. Thus, they are trained for their occupational activities, within their families.

Economy

As a result of migration from their native land, these people have severely suffered, economically. They, on their arrival in Kashmir, depended on government aid, for a long time. As per a report of a survey, in 1991, of their economic activities, following information was provided[17].

These people are mostly tradesmen of very little importance. Some of them were reported to be skilled artisans. The following occupational structure was found:

Occupation	Male	Female
Business/Trade	56.5%	0.0%
Artisans	43.5%	0.0%
Knitting	0.0%	100%
Total	100%	100%

The men folk are businessmen and artisans and constitute 56.5% and 43.5% of the population respectively. Some of them work as roadside vendors selling caps, ready-made garments, sweaters etc. They set up stalls along the road sides in the city markets. The artisans are generally machine embroideries, having shops in different localities of Srinagar. This occupation is now considered as the exclusive occupation of these people, by common Kashmiris. In addition to the above-mentioned occupations, some of them are found involved in some employments in the service sector. Only 0.4 percent of the total is involved in this sector. The table below is the outcome of a survey conducted in 1994.

Nature of Employment	Male	Female	Total
IAS Officers	1	0	1
Physician (MBBS)	1	0	1
State govt employee (a)	2	0	2
Nationalised Banks	0	1	1
Foreign Job (Gulf)	1	0	1
Private (b)	2	0	2

- a) Appointed as a special case, one in state Road Transport Co. and other in State finance department.
- b) Working in local Tibetan Muslim School run by Tibetan welfare Association.

In addition to this, two persons are working at Dharamsala (Himachal Pradesh) in an organisation run by Dalai Lama. These people are unable to get any job in the state government departments, because there is restriction of jobs in J&K state for the non-state subjects, as per the Article 370 of the constitution of India.

Marriage

Commonly understood, within the Islamic fold, the institution of marriage is a contract between a male and female, for the procreation of children and establishment of a family. As mentioned earlier, marriage among these people leads to the birth of a new family. Marriage in 100% cases was found monogamous in nature. It could be endogamous or exogamous. About 95% of these were found homogamous and other 5% heterogamous. The case of heterogamous marriage was like one case of a girl married to a Kashmiri Muslim. One case of a man married to a Nepali

woman. Few cases of inter-religious marriages were also found; where a Tibetan Muslim man was married to Tibetan Buddhist woman.

The age at which marriage is performed among these people was found as follows:

Age Group	Male	Female
17-23 years	3.2%	21%
24-29 years	61.3%	79%
30-35 years	35.5%	---

Thus, most of the males marry in the age group of 24 to 29 years and same was the case with girls. In marriage, mate selection was reported to be mostly done by the mutual consent of the parents and the prospective bride and groom. In the sample survey, it was revealed that 35.5% of the marriages were performed by the girls' and boys' own choice whereas 19.4% by the parents initiative only and 45.1% by the mutual consent of the parents and the children[18].

The marriages, as reported, were performed in quite simple manner. No system of dowry was found among them. Informants reported that it was not compulsory to bring even a single dress for the prospective mates by any party to marriage. However, some of them do bring gold ornaments etc for the bride, but there is no compulsion in this matter. Grooms are required to pay the dower (Maher-a- Islamic tradition) in between Rs. 3000 and 5000.

There is no festivity on the occasions of marriage. No song or music or dance etc. is performed to celebrate the occasion. However, a feast is offered to the relatives and neighbours. The traditional cuisines of Kashmir are served to the guests. There is rarely any use of traditional Tibetan dishes, on these occasions. The bride is dressed in the traditional Tibetan costumes.

Diets and Costumes

The costume of these people has been found partly Tibetan and partly of other forms. Male members of the community seldom use the traditional Tibetan dress. They wear kameez pyjama, which is used by the Muslims of the sub-continent. Youth and children use dresses of modern form. Girls wear common Kashmiri dress-firaq shalwar with scarf over their heads. In addition to these, Kashmiri traditional dress-pheron (A long coat) is used by men and young women during winter. However, aged women who have lived in Tibet for most of the time, wear their traditional dress called *Chubba*. However, it was reported that on the occasion of marriages, all the ladies of the community wear their traditional dress. Food habits of these people have also changed to a great extent. In rare cases, old men and women eat the traditional food of *sattu* (roasted barely flour). Young people have no taste for it. The rice and chapatis (wheat loaves) form the staple food of these people. They are found habitants of Kashmiri vegetarian and non-vegetarian preparations. On some rare occasion they prepare the traditional Tibetan foods such as *noodles*, *mumak* (steam cooked snacks), *thukpa*, *chuman* etc.

Education

There was rarely any literature among them, during the time of their migration to Kashmir. Only a few of them knew Arabic, Persian and Urdu. After they came to Kashmir, the modern education was slowly achieved by them. Now a days, most of their children go to government and private schools. They have, also, set up a public school, of their own. The school of the middle standard level is recognised by the state education department, as is case with most recognised public schools of the state. It is reported that religious as well as secular education is provided to the children of the community. The Imams of the community mosques at Hawal and Idd Gah, provides religious education, Quran and theology, in an informal form of education. 83.9% of the children are provided religious education[19].

There, as per survey, the following was the educational position of the community: 80 boys and 6 girls were studying in the Tibetan School. 10 boys and 4 girls were studying in the colleges of Srinagar. 5 men were studying in Delhi, 12 boys were studying Islamiyat (Theological Educational Institute, Nadwatul Uloom, Lucknow), 3 girls studying at Rai Bareili Islamic Institute. So far as the state government is concerned, it does not provide any kind of scholarship to any of their students. However, as reported, Tibetan Organisations in India, do provide financial assistance to the students of this community.

Social Organisation

The different families of this community bear various caste names, which are more or less, similar to those of Kashmiris. The different caste names-family names with their number in the community are given below:

Name	No. of families
Masali	5
Ganai	15
Wani	25
Bhat	75
Shah colie	12
Tantray	10
Zareer	10
Gona	13
Baba	10
Dout	5
Sheikh	5
Shamu	15
Total No. of Families	200

Traditionally, as reported by the informants, *Massali*, *Ganai*, *Shami* and *Sheikh* are the highest in the social status and *Bhats* are the lowest. However, presently no such division in social status is manifested in this community. Imam of the community mosque enjoys the highest social status in the community. Imam has authority with regard to the religious as well as social matters of the community. He is bestowed with the powers of social control in the community. The Imam could

impose ban on the superfluous expenses on the occasion of various ceremonies, which has to be strictly followed. The people of this community do not take the membership of any social, political or religious organisation of Kashmir, as per the report of the informants. They themselves also have not formed any political, religious or economic organisation, except one social organisation called Tibetan Muslim Association. This association was established in 1977. It was registered under J&K Societies Act. Some of the aims of the association were described as follows:

1. Providing housing facilities to all the families of the community.
2. Construction of mosque in the locality, under their own control
3. Establishment of school.
4. Establishment of Craft Training Centre for girls.
5. Striving for the provision of higher education to the students outside the valley.

Achievements

According to them, they have been successful in constructing new settlement for the houseless families of the community. They have also been successful in getting land for the construction of mosque and have completed its construction, at Hawal. They have also established a school. They do send some of their talented children to schools run by Tibetan organisations in different parts of the country. They had got a carpet weaving training centre established for the girls of the community, but due to irregular attendance, it was closed. Common people of the community complain that the association was not working satisfactorily.

Conclusion

Tibetan Muslims sought refuge in Kashmir, only because of their ancestral relations with Kashmir. However, they have not been able to live in close conformity with the locals. They live, as if in a ghetto, within the Kashmiri cultural whole. They are economically poor. They are mostly tradesmen of very little importance. They are trying hard for the educational development and as a result of this they have been successful in getting a foothold among the intellectuals. They want to preserve their traditional religious norms. They have not been successful in preserving their cultural traits. Their culture has, more or less, got interwoven in the overall Kashmir cultural tapestry. Yet, being endogamous, they have been able to maintain the separate strand of their ethnic identity, and external influences, occasioned by a few exogamous marriages, are still at minimum. As such, they have not been able to develop affinal relationship with the common Kashmiris. One can only expect that in the days to come, they will strike a viable relationship with the Kashmiris and contribute to the socio-cultural development of Kashmir as a whole.

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