

REVISITING TIBET-SIKKIM RELATIONS AND THE HISTORY OF BORDER MAKING: A CASE OF RUMTEK MONASTERY AND THE INSTITUTION OF KARMAPA.

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Abstract:

Delving into the role of Buddhism that connected the histories of Sikkim and Tibet, this paper attempts to locate the current controversy surrounding Rumtek Monastery and the institution of Karmapa. Within the historical framework of Tibet-Sikkim relations, the idea is to understand the relevance of this monastery and how the modern day border making has turned it into a politicized religious institution.

Introduction

The relationship between Tibet and Sikkim existed long before the drawing of the border and the demarcation of nation state. Buddhism played a central role in defining their political and cultural relations. A great number of Tibetan monasteries were constructed and practiced along the Himalayan kingdom. After the occupation of Tibet and Sikkim by China and India respectively the entire political calculations changed. Tibetans who used to be the equal neighbours became refugees in many of the Indian states including Sikkim. Tibetan monasteries located in the border states of India have become the victim of State making and the margin making. Rumtek monastery in Sikkim is an ideal example of how these political demarcations have changed the fate of religious and cultural practices in Sikkim.

At present, the Rumtek monastery and the institution of Karmapa stands at the crossroad between India, China and the Tibetan exile living in India. The recognition of the true 17th Karmapa and the inheritance of Karmapa Charitable trust lies at the heart of the Rumtek Controversy. The controversy involves the 14th Dalai Lama, the Chinese government, the Indian Court, and also the inter-sectarian conflicts which has led to the factions within the Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The involvement of China in the recognition of Karmapa has raised suspicion on the Indian side. Hence, Rumtek monastery is militarily guarded by the Indian forces and Karmapa is not allowed to take his seat in Sikkim for security concerns. In the name of national interest and national security the religious and cultural practices shared by the border communities came under strict scrutiny. Hence taking the case of Rumtek monastery in Sikkim, this paper aims at highlighting the historical significance and the contemporary controversy surrounding Rumtek monastery.

An overview of Tibetan and Sikkimese Relations: A Historical Perspective

Percy Brown (1917) in his book 'Tours in Sikkim and Darjeeling District' writes, "In religion, in politics and in social matters, the people of Sikkim have been guided by the authorities of Lhasa, and all the institutions of the State were based largely on those of Tibet. Unfortunately, the opportunist economics of 19th century colonialism weakened Sikkim's historical umbilical cord. Political developments and economics have heavily diluted the traditional ties with Tibet. Whatever the case be, the idea of Tibet remains closely wedded to Sikkim (Datta-Ray 2017). Buddhism is one such sphere where Tibet and Sikkim cannot be separated.

Sikkim is located in the eastern Himalayan region of India bordered between the historic forces of the sub Himalaya: Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan. The history of Sikkim like most States is intertwined with the histories of its neighbours. Since the focus of this paper is on addressing the relations between Tibet and Sikkim, we shall focus particularly on how Sikkimese history and culture has largely been influenced by the Tibetan history. Saul Mullard, a prominent scholar remarks, 'Sikkim is part of the 'Tibetan' region that falls outside the political and geographical boundaries of Tibet. Hence Sikkim has to be understood within the wider Tibetan context'. Historically, the extent of Tibetan influence in the Sikkimese society finds relevance in the religious, linguistic, political practices, divine kingship, the unified system of religion and politics and the writing of the legal and administrative documents (Mullard 2011:2).

Today, Sikkim is extremely diverse State in India. However, her historical interaction with Tibet still finds place in social and religious practices. Tibetan Buddhism is one such sphere where Sikkim and Tibet cannot be separated. Though this paper highlights the religious dimensions of the historical connection between the two, it is to be understood that, Tibetan society had impact on other spheres of Sikkimese society i.e. the economic practices, land ownerships, structure of taxation, and form of stratification etc.

If one has to look at the primary sources of reference for tracing Tibet-Sikkim relations, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and Sikkimese Palace archives located in Gangtok (the capital of Sikkim), has a well documented collection of letters and correspondence between the two. According to the local, historical narratives, the formation of 'Sikkim' begins with the consecration of Phuntsok Namgyal as the first king of Sikkim and establishment of the Namgyal dynasty. Going back to the history of Tibet, the first king Neh Thi-Tsenpo was a descendent from Namgyal ancestor, Indrabodhi, who ruled the Indian State of Himachal Pradesh. An offspring of this line, Khye Bumsa, travelled to Sikkim in the 13th century. Phuntsok

Namgyal, the first king of Sikkim was the great grandson of Khye Bumsa who came from the Tibetan soil (Datta-Ray 2013).

The history of Sikkim or the discovery of Sikkim begins with the journey of three Tibetan lamas who met at Yoksum (the first capital of Sikkim) and finds the ruler of this hidden land, Phuntsok Namgyal. (Mullard 2011). As per the Tibetan tradition, he was given the title of Chogyal or the Gyalpo (King). Hence, the modern history of Sikkim can be traced with the coronation of Phuntsok Namgyal in 1642 with the recognition from the Dalai Lama of Tibet. The Dalai Lama also presented him the Silken Scarf bearing Dalai Lama's seal, the mitre (hat) of Guru Rinpoche, the devil dagger (Phurpa) and the most precious image of Guru Rinpoche.

Sikkim was not always a Buddhist land, the original inhabitants of Sikkim (Iepchas, Limboos and the Mangars) were the indigenous tribes who worshiped nature. With the advent of Namgyal dynasty the State of Sikkim witnessed the conversion to Buddhism. The newly established principality of Namgyal dynasty was tied to Tibetan theocracy. Mahayana Buddhism was declared as the State religion and continued to be the State religion under all the Namgyal rulers (Mullard 2005). Hence, the history and practice of Tibetan Buddhism as a dominant religion of Sikkim traces its origin to 17th century. The four important sects of Tibetan Buddhism; Gelugpa, Kagyupa, Nyingmapa and Sakya also flourished in the soil of Sikkim under the Namgyal administration.

Sikkim saw the establishment of numerous monasteries which served the social, political and religious interests of the rulers and the ruled. Monasteries have great meaning in the lives of Sikkimese Buddhists and believers from other faiths. Apart from the religious purpose monasteries also served as the institution of learning and education (Shrestha 2011). This form of education was popularly known as lamaistic education which aimed at providing religious education, the study of Buddhist religious scriptures, preparing the learners for religious order and to propagate Buddhism and convert the Lepchas and the Limboos to it. The syllabus of monastic education in Sikkim was based on the model of Tibetan monasteries. The students were taught traditional ritualistic prayers, religion, uses of musical instruments during rites, practices and dances.

According to the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Government of Sikkim, In ancient monarchy system of government in Sikkim, i.e. the period starting from first Chhogyal Phuntshok Namgyal (1604-1670) to the 7th King Sikyong Namgyal (1819-1874), there existed a unique system of assembly called "Lhade -Mide which comprised of the representatives from Sangha or Monastic Community and the representatives from the General Public. The monasteries were then provided with sufficient lands in the form of ChoZhi or 'Monastic Estate' for the monastic Community to sustain their religious affairs. All these arrangements were guided and influenced by Tibet.

Three important monasteries i.e. Sgrub sde, Lha Khang dmar po, and Kah thog constructed in the early years of Namgyal dynasty is still revered with immense gratitude and pride by the Sikkimese population till today (Rinpoche 1992). The antecedents and forms of monasteries in Sikkim can be traced to Tibet.

Ralang monastery in South Sikkim and Rumtek monastery in East Sikkim are two of the largest monasteries in Sikkim built by the 4th Chogyal, Gyurmed Namgyal. The monastery was authorized by the 12th Karmapa Changchub Dorje in Tibet (ibid). There are altogether 108 monasteries in Sikkim, of which the majority of the monasteries were constructed under the influence of Lhasa administration (Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Government of Sikkim 2019).

The institution of 'Reincarnation' is central to the legacies of Tibetan religious practices in Sikkim. The reincarnation system (tulku), a distinguishing characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism, is based on the theory that Buddha's soul never vanishes, but reincarnates in succession to lead his followers and to accomplish his mission (Gyatso 2015). One of the first reincarnations among the Buddhist monks in Tibet is Karma Pakshi. In 1193, before Dusum Chenpa, a religious leader, the first Karmapa of the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, passed away, he told his disciples that he would return as a reincarnated being. His disciples soon led a search for his infant reincarnation in accordance with his will. Several years later, Karma Pakshi turned out as the first reincarnation in Tibet and trained to be Karma Kagyu leader. After Karma Pakshi's reincarnation, the reincarnation system was adopted by other sects gradually to keep a consistent religious leadership. By applying the system, heirs for hundreds of Gyalwas (Living Buddhas) were selected, among whom the Dalai Lama the Panchen Lama and the Karmapa are the most prestigious.

Goldstein and Tsarong 1985 writes, on the hierarchy of reincarnations in Tibetan Buddhism; Dalai Lama as first, Panchen lama as second and Karmapa as third in Tibetan Buddhism. Kolas (2008) mentions about the informal significant role of 17th Karmapa during the interim period i.e. after the death of the 14th Dalai Lama and the reincarnation of the 15th Dalai Lama. The significance of these religious heads for the Tibetans also hold significance for the Sikkimese Buddhist population. Goldstein (1989), discusses the importance of monks, tulkus and other religious heads in the Tibetan tradition. Within these titles they mention the significance of Karmapas, Longchenpas, Tsong Khapa etc and their political and religious influence in consolidating and organizing the Tibetan society. Since these titles were directly associated to one or the other monasteries, their works underlined the monastic setup as the core of Tibetan society. Norbu (1972) writes elaboratively on the role of religion in Tibetan society and the importance of monastic organizations. Apart from the understanding which asserts the monasteries as playing a central structural role, he also highlights how monasteries also played the structural role of religious beliefs. He further emphasizes on the centrality of this religious belief which has kept the Tibetan tradition alive in spite of several attacks and destruction.

The traditional Sikkim witnessed the visits of higher Lamas (Dalai Lama, Panchen Lama and the Karmapa). The royal family hosted these religious heads with heartfelt gratitude and honour. Since, Tibet was a theocratic State headed by Dalai Lama, the exchange of such personal visits also had political goals. Many a times, the Dalai Lama trusted the Chogyal for storing the Potala's gold underneath the palace garage. The Tibetan soldiers were assigned to guard the garage (Datta-Ray 2017).

The relations between Tibet and Sikkim was strengthened by the matrimonial ties. Sikkimese royals and aristocrats had matrimonial ties with the Tibetan princess. Every Chogyal (King) of Sikkim had a Tibetan Gyalmo (wife). Of all the Chogyals, the 9th Chogyal, Thutob Namgyal was heavily influenced by his Tibetan mother and wife. He spent most of his life in Tibet staying aloof from his administrative duties and responsibilities. The first wife of the last Chogyal, Palden Thudop Namgyal married the member of the 7th Dalai Lama of Tibet. His sisters also married into the families of 8th and 12th Dalai Lamas. Owing to these matrimonial connections with the royals of Tibet, the Sikkimese kings enjoyed the privilege of owning enclaves in Tibet. These exchanges were reciprocal in nature. The province of Taring, Chumbi palace, ancient monasteries of Bhakeham and Kirungtral, Sohar, Chokah, Tehrig and Nyentse of Tibet were under Sikkim's control (Datta-Ray 2017).

Tibet-Sikkim relations was viewed within the matrix of subsumed political relations, as a tributary of Tibet. Administratively, within both Tibet and Sikkim 'lower levels' of authority existed. For example, Tashilhunpo, Saska in Tibet or Lachen, Lachung or the aristocratic estates in Sikkim were subsumed either under the Tibetan State or the Sikkimese State. In the cases of legal disputes, there existed legal framework whereby disputed legal cases of Sikkim could be appealed to Lhasa (Tibet) (Mullard 2013). The relationship between Lhasa and Sikkim is described as that of an uncle and nephew. In the

Sikkimese history, at the times of crisis and instability, Sikkim has looked upto Tibet for her intervention. In the view of the above remarks, Saul Mullard observes, 'It is perhaps then accurate to understand Sikkim at certain times, as a State in orbit around Lhasa'.

The History of Border making in Tibet-Sikkim Relations

The historical relations between Tibet and Sikkim deteriorated after the Chinese and the British interference in the trans-himalayan politics. Tibet and Sikkim were squeezed on two sides by the strong growing interest by China and British India respectively. There were two short periods of strong Chinese interest in Tibet i.e. during 1871-75 and 1905-1912. On the Sikkimese side, the arrival and appointment of Lord Curzon as the Viceroy of India in 1899 altered the British Tibetan policy from 'indirect' negotiation through China to 'direct' intervention and 'Positive activity' in the region. Also the Young Husband mission of 1904 further complicated the relationship between Tibet and Sikkim. British India's interest in reaching Tibet through Sikkim resulted in serious of hostile events between India-China relations which in return hampered the Tibet-Sikkim relations (Kaleon 2017). It is to be noted that both Tibet and Sikkim were under the suzerainty of the Chinese government and British India.

The Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890 marks the formal establishment of the border between Tibet and Sikkim. The Sikkim-Tibet border was agreed upon in 1890 and in 1895 it was jointly demarcated on the ground. When Sikkim was founded in the middle of the seventeenth century the boundary of the state was different. It was Dibdala on the north bordering Tibet, on the east it touched Bhutan at Tanga, on the west at Tamar Chorten bordering with Nepal and on the south the border was at Titalia. At the end of the nineteenth century, when the British took over, after the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890, the boundary of Sikkim, as described in the 1890 Convention, was: "The boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Teesta and its affluents from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu and northwards into other rivers of Tibet. The line commences at Mount Gipmochi on the Bhutan frontier and follows the above-mentioned water-parting to the point where it meets Nepal Territory." This convention dealt with the issues on trade, communication and pasturage predominantly between British India and China rather than the traditionally established communication between Tibet and Sikkim alone.

Historically Tibet and Sikkim were linked by porous boundaries which connected the regions religiously, culturally and economically. Five important passes i.e. Nathu-la, Jelep-la, Cho-la, Kangra-la and Chorten Nyima-la passes acted as a bridge in connecting the border communities. These passes provided opportunities for travel, trade, pilgrimage and pastoral activities. Kangra-la and Chorten Nyima-la passes in North Sikkim were important trading points for both Tibet and Sikkim. The trade items included timber, spices, fruits, black salt, gold, precious stones, tea, wool and carpets. Wangchu (2013) mentions, these passes not only met the commercial needs of both the border communities but also fostered social, cultural and religious interactions. But, at present the passes located in North Sikkim are not being used as it has become a hard border (Thapa 2017).

The British could not ignore the fostering commercial linkages between the traditional Tibet and Sikkim. Hence in 1873, a traditional route through Nathu-la into Tibet was formally established by considering the report of John Edgar, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling. Later, the Nathu-la pass was officially used by British for political expeditions and official visits to Tibet. Nathu La played a vital role in the 1903-1904 British expedition to Tibet. In 1904, Major Francis Younghusband, serving as the British Commissioner to Tibet, led a successful mission through Nathu La to capture Lhasa. This led to the setting up of trading posts at Gyantse and Gartok in Tibet, and gave control of the surrounding Chumbi Valley to the British.

After China took control of Tibet in 1950 and suppressed a Tibetan uprising in 1959, the passes into Sikkim became a conduit for refugees from Tibet. During the 1962 Sino-Indian War, Nathu La witnessed skirmishes between soldiers of the two countries. Shortly thereafter, the passage was sealed and remained closed for more than four decades. Between 7 and 13 September 1967, China's People's Liberation Army and the Indian Army had six-day "border skirmishes", including the exchange of heavy artillery fire (Nesterenko 1992). In 1975, Sikkim acceded to India and Nathu La became part of Indian territory. China, however, refused to acknowledge the accession at that time. It was only in 2007 that China recognized Sikkim as a part of India.

Apart from trade and commerce between the traditional Tibet and Sikkim, the religious exchanges between the two were greatly facilitated by these passes. Buddhism travelled across the Himalayas along the Buddhist lamas. Since Sikkim had close religious and cultural ties with Tibet, these impacts were reflected in the infrastructure of Sikkim's monasteries.

Architects from Tibet travelled across the border for checks on deviances on monastery building. These monasteries are indispensable to Sikkim's artistic and architectural identity. However, the Sino-India war of 1962 sundered the link by closing the border between India and China. The 1890 Anglo-Chinese Convention had no provision for any of such religious continuity between Tibet and Sikkim.

The modern border history of Tibet and Sikkim has entered a new phase after Tibet came under the occupation of China (1950s) and India (since 1975) respectively. The Dalai Lama's flight to India from Tibet in 1950s and the 1962 India-China war has further securitized the border Nathu-La and was closed until it was reopened in 2006. After the People's Republic of China took control of Tibet in 1950 and suppressed a Tibetan uprising in 1959, the passes into Sikkim became a conduit for refugees from Tibet.

Today India is hosting millions of Tibetan refugees of which the Himalayan State of Sikkim is one. Though, India facilitates and respects the century old relations shared by Tibet and Sikkim, there are pertinent issues that stands tall before India in the face of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan monasteries. The neighbour across the border of Nathu-La is detrimental in defining India's attitude towards the Tibetans living in India.

Rumtek Monastery: A Politicized Religious Institution

According to Tibet's Parliament in Exile (2009), there are 208 Tibetan monasteries (with over 27451 monks) and 17 nunneries (which have more than 1696 nuns) established in exile. Out of these, 140 monasteries are in India scattered in refugee settlements and the Himalayan belt. This paper concentrates on Rumtek monastery located in Sikkim.

The significance of Rumtek monastery is inalienably attached to the institution of 'Reincarnating lamas' and the lineage of Karmapa, which was a powerful institution in both Tibet and Sikkim. The tradition of reincarnation or the Tulku system (the unique custom of lamas returning life after life to teach students), originated in Tibet with 'Karmapa' as the first Tulku of Tibet (Curren 2006). This system was copied by other sects and monasteries who chose their next reincarnation. The Tulkus became the source of power and attracted donations and students. Three centuries after the first Karmapa, the reincarnation tradition of Dalai Lama appeared. The continuation of this tradition entered Sikkim along with the establishment of Namgyal dynasty. Originally the Rumtek monastery was built under the direction of 12th Karmapa in the mid-1700s. The establishment of this monastery and the traditions attached to it is not a recent phenomenon. Its impact and importance influenced the Sikkimese society long before any foreign interventions or the border makings. Hence, any developments around this powerful institution is likely to impact the sentiments of the people and society at large. Rumtek monastery was built under the direction of Changchub Dorje, 12th Karmapa Lama in the mid 1700s, it served as the main seat of the Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism in Sikkim for some time. But when Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, 16th Karmapa, arrived in Sikkim in 1959 after fleeing Tibet, the monastery was in ruins. With the help of the Sikkim's royal family and the local folks of Sikkim, it was rebuilt by the 16th Karmapa as his main seat in exile. Rumtek is important because of its shared history with Tsurphu monastery in Tibet. It is believed that this monastery in Exile is the manifestation of Tsurphu monastery of Tibet. The monastery contains the sacred items and relics brought from the Tsurphu monastery. These relics and sacred items were managed by the Karmapa Charitable Trust established by the 16th Karmapa in 1861. The Trust is entitled to preserve the Karmapa's estates, belongings, valuable relics and also to manage the financial affairs of the monastery. The larger objectives of the Trust was also to construct hospitals and educational institutions at Rumtek and other Karmapa Gompas.

After the death of the 16th karmapa a bitter feud broke out between the high lamas responsible for identifying his successor: at least two persons are claiming to be the 17th Karmapa i.e. Ugyen Thinley Dorjee and Thaye Dorjee. The ownership of Karmapa Charitable Trust by two claimants of Karmapa seat Ugyen Thinley Dorje and Thaye Thinley Dorje lies at the heart of Karmapa controversy. Erik D. Curren in his book 'Buddha's not smiling: Uncovering corruption at the heart of Tibetan Buddhism Today' gives a detailed account of how Rumtek monastery and the Karmapa Charitable Trust was under unsuccessful attack by Tai Situ Rinpoche and team (the ardent supporter of Ugyen Thinley Dorje). Though Karmapa Charitable Trust is an independent body, media reports hint at the inclination of the Trust towards Thaye Thinley Dorje. Both the High Court of Sikkim and the Supreme Court of India was involved in solving the dispute. The verdict of the Supreme Court was drawn in favour of the Karmapa Charitable Trust which is the legal guardian of Rumtek monastery. The supporters of Ugyen Thinley Dorjee and also the Karma Kagyu organization are not happy with the judgement.

However, a majority of the Tibetans including the 14th Dalai Lama recognizes Ugyen Thinley Dorjee as the real Karmapa. Soon after the Dalai Lama's official recognition of Ugyen Thinley as the 17th karmapa,

China also recognized Ugyen Thinley Dorjee as the 17th Karmapa. Having found that the Chinese were involved in this recognition, the Government of India had placed restrictions on Ugyen Thinley Dorje's entry to Sikkim. Historically there has been no instances of two claimants for any of the seats within all sects of Tibetan Buddhism. Also the case of 17th Karmapa has been ironic as both the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government had endorsed him as the 17th Karmapa.

For India, Rumtek monastery becomes important because China's involvement directly concerns the national security agenda. Historically, China has never acknowledged any forms of Tibetan Buddhism but the official acceptance of Ugyen Trinley Dorjee as 17th karmapa of Kagyu sect in Rumtek Monastery is a security concern for India (Anand 2007). China's interest in the 'reincarnation politics' can be understood by the confiscation of the Dalai Lama's chosen Panchen Lama and the installation of its own

Panchen Lama. China has also officially announced that it will choose the next Dalai Lama (Anand 2007). Hence, the seat of Karmapa is important to China given the Tibetan identity attached to these monasteries and also because of China's increasing anxiousness about 'reincarnation politics' of Tibetan religious heads (Kazmin 2017).

Indian suspicion about Ugyen Thinley Dorjee comes from his easy escape from Tibet in 2000. Security agencies of India suspect him of being sent to India deliberately to create another power centre among Tibetans. Intelligence agencies are of the view that smooth passage could not be possible without the support of the Chinese troops. Adding to this, the discovery of one million dollars in foreign currency including 166,000 dollars in Chinese currency at the residence of Tibetan's revered Karmapa Ugyen Thinley Dorjee fuelled suspicion for the Indian government. Indian suspicion is whether he is a Chinese spy plotting a monastic empire along the border (Yardley 2011). India has blocked him from taking his seat in Rumtek for these suspicions and also until claims from rival Tibetan factions are resolved.

P. Stobdan in his article, 'Tibet and the security of the Indian Himalayan belt' warns elaborately on the Tibetanization of the Indian Himalayan belt. One of his resentments has been the influence of Ugyen

Thinley Dorje backed by China in Tibetanizing a sizable portion of India's eastern Himalayas, including Sikkim. He alleges China of carefully working out a plot to have Ugyen Thinley enthroned in the Rumtek monastery with the connivance of their confidant Tai Situ Rinpoche. However, the undercurrent of resentment vis-à-vis the Government of India's decision to prevent Ugyen Dorje's control over

Rumtek is growing in Sikkim. The Government of Sikkim along with the Joint Action Committee of the All Sikkim Buddhist Organization (JAC-ASBO) among others have been attempting to get Ugyen Thinley to Rumtek.

The involvement of China and Indian insecurities over these monasteries has had a huge impact on the Tibetan and the Sikkimese population. Tibet's political leaders including the 14th Dalai Lama have clarified the discovery of foreign currency as a financial aid given to the monastery including the aid from Chinese followers. But they have dismissed any suspicion about the Karmapa's being a Chinese spy. Samdong Rinpoche, the Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in exile has stated, "Baseless, all baseless. Not a fraction of anything has a base of truth". Many Tibetans reject the spying allegations. However India seems wary of Tibetan activities. The Indian police are investigating new Tibetan monasteries near the border for possible ties to China (Yardley 2011). This has affected the Tibetan trust towards India. Since, India has always been a steadfast friend of Tibetans by providing refuge to Tibetans, the politicization of these monasteries with the interference of China is now wavering Indian support towards Tibetans. The Karmapa episode has also led to the division among the followers of Tibetan Buddhism in Sikkim.

For the Tibetans, Sikkimese and the Tibetan Buddhists living across the globe, it is becoming increasingly confusing to understand the political calculation between the Dalai Lama and China. Since the Dalai Lama has also recognized the Chinese recognized candidate as the 17th karmapa, it has become obligatory for them to support Ugyen Thinley Dorje as the 17th karmapa. However, there are factions among the Indian followers regarding the Karmapa issue because of China's involvement and Indian government's suspicion. Since 1992, the Rumtek monastery has been the site of pitched battles between followers supporting one candidate or the other. Neither candidate resides, nor has been enthroned, at Rumtek. Monks supporting Trinley Thaye Dorje (the minority) were thrown out of Rumtek by Indian security forces in order to quell violence between the two factions. Armed Indian soldiers still patrol the monastery to prevent further sectarian violence. There have been protests going on in Sikkim as well as

New Delhi for not allowing Ugyen Trinley Dorjee to come to Rumtek monastery and take his seat as the 17th Karmapa who was previously residing in Dharamsala at the Gyuto Tantric University till 2017. Owing to the tight security arrangements and Indian Governments continued scrutiny Ugyen Thinley had moved to the United States in 2017 and shows no signs of return to India.

Therefore, Rumtek monastery is no more confined to being a place of worship, rather it has become a politicized religious institution. The suspicion from China has forced India to militarily guard these holy institutions and also restrict the monastic activities against China. These monasteries are facing law and order situation inside India. The Indian government is being criticized by the government of Sikkim and the Tibetans for not allowing Ugyen Trinley Dorjee to take his seat at Rumtek. Within the larger nexus of geo political strategies and national insecurities the centuries old traditional practices and beliefs of both the Tibetans and Sikkimese have come to a stalemate.

Conclusion

The traditions and practices shared by these historically significant border communities cannot be demeaned simply by drawing borders. Hence, the controversy on Rumtek monastery requires a deeper understanding of historical underpinnings. The significance of Rumtek has to be understood beyond the definition of a monastery. Rumtek and the institution of Karmapa attached to it serves as the source of traditional power which played a pivotal role in establishing the belief system of the societies involved. In spite of the border demarcation and forced national identities, these belief systems and traditions are bound to pop up at any course of time.

Beginning with an overview of historical relations between Tibet and Sikkim, this paper has given a brief account of how the inter-state politics between India and China has altered the relations between the Tibetans and the Sikkimese. However, there are unexplored areas which necessitate deeper explanations and enquiry, such as Tibet's relation with China and the context under which Sikkim became part of India.

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