

NEPALESE IN TIBET: A CASE STUDY OF NEPALESE HALF-BREEDS (1856-1956)

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Introduction

History of Nepal-Tibet relations can be traced from the ancient period. One of the substantive attributes of historical intercourse between the two trans-Himalayan countries was the growth of Nepalese half-breeds or *Khacharas*. Geo-politic imperatives and the commercial considerations were the fundamental factors that effected the unique and exceptional historical development of the *Khacharas* system. *Khacharas* constituted an important factor which greatly influenced Nepal-Tibet relations during the period between 1856 to 1956. Therefore, the study of substantive aspects of the *Khachara* deserves our attention.

Economic factors invariably play a decisive role in the foreign policy of any country. The Nepalese foreign policy was essentially governed by economic considerations. Since ancient times commerce emerged as the main determinant phenomenon in Nepal's relation with her neighboring countries. Specially, after the opening of Kerung route in 17th century closer interaction among China, Tibet, India and Nepal had developed. Consequently Kathmandu turned into a prime center of Trans-Himalayan communications and became a meeting ground of all traders. In fact political instability in Tibet after 7th century facilitated Nepal to monopolise Tibetan trade.

Nepalese trade with Tibet further expanded during medieval period regulating trade traffic between India and Tibet. Though history of Nepal-Tibet relations had long historical background there was no defined treaty, contract, or pact which outline the statutory frame work to regularize the relationship. It was only a historical development of no contact between two countries based on oriental diplomatic pattern guided by the commercial motives. However, dimension of Nepal – Tibet intercourse was formulated in definite logistics during 17th century. Exploiting the weak political situation

in Tibet, Kantipur attack and forced her to sign a treaty (1645-50) which acquired substantial privileges for Kantipur in Tibet.

1. Firstly, The Kathmandu traders were permitted to establish thirty-two trading marts at Lhasa.
2. The Kathmandu King was authorized to appoint a representative (Nayo in Newar, Nayak in Nepali) at the Court of Lhasa.
3. Tibet agreed not to impose any sort of duties on Newar merchants throughout Tibet.
4. Kathmandu obtained a right of minting coins for Tibet and Tibet agreed to pay for required quantity of silver and gold.
5. Tibet agreed to conduct all trade with India, via Nepal even though conducted by other than Newar merchants.

The most important than these was the privilege that Nepalese could marry Tibetan women, male offspring from such marriage were regarded Nepalese subjects. Contemporary documents have referred these Tibetan born Nepalese as *Khacharas* so the same terminology is being used in this paper. It is interesting to note that the female child from a Nepalese father and Tibetan mother was acknowledged as a Tibetan citizen. The Tibetan government agreed to accept the *Khacharas* as Nepalese subjects and granted them the privileges and facilities accorded to the Nepalese traders in Tibet. The *Khachara* system was an peculiar system and exceptional privilege which established Nepalese jurisdiction over Tibetan born Nepalese.

The Kantipur-Tibet treaty in fact was the turning point in the history of Nepal –Tibet relations. The privileges facilitated the Nepalese traders to acquire monopoly in Tibetan trade. In addition to this, it encouraged Nepalese traders to reside in Tibet. Later on these privileges were extended to the traders of Bhaktapur and Lalitpur, the other principalities of Kathmandu valley. This tremendously helped to spread Nepalese trade and settlements all over Tibet. Consequently the number of *Khacharas* increased through the years to become an integral component of Nepal-Tibet relations. Nevertheless, no alteration was made in the status of *Khacharas* for centuries and the same tradition prevailed up to the mid 20th century.

During modern period, three major Nepal-Tibet treaties of 1789, 1792 and 1856 A.D. defined Nepal's relation with her northern neighbours in new prospective which regulated the dynamics of Nepal-Tibet affairs.¹ But as they remained silent regarding the question of Nepalese *Khacharas*. The system perpetuated as before. However, by 20th century the *Khachara* problem

became more complex due to unsympathetic attitude of both Nepal and Tibet and it needed co-ordinated restructuring of the system. It was further complicated by increasingly assertive policy of China towards Tibet. Nepal was obliged to readjust her policy towards Tibet vis-à-vis China after Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1950. Need for a basic format of a new diplomatic structure became necessary after China and India signed Panchasheel in 1954. So Nepal China peace and friendship treaty was concluded in 1955 and 1956 which not only recognized Tibet as the autonomous region of China but also abrogated all the privileges and rights enjoyed by Nepal in Tibet. This ended *Khachara* system as well.

Despite the fact that Nepal Tibet trade existed since Lichchhavi period, the number of Nepali traders settled in Tibet was meager due to several causes – long distance, geo-political condition and cultural differences. But the advantages of Pratap Malla's treaty not only enhanced the volume of trade but also encouraged traders to establish settlements in Tibet. The exceptional matrimonial prerogative and *Khachara* system gradually multiplied the number of Nepalese traders settled in Lhasa. Subsequently Nepalese settlement extended in other strategic parts of Tibet, such as Sighatse (Digarcha), Gyantse, Yatung, Kuti, Kerung etc., and their number gradually multiplied. It was generally accepted that Nepalese traders were not permitted to take their family, specially wives along with them to Tibet. Rahul (B.S. 1990: 111) Sankrityayan has remarked that Nepalese merchants and even the officials were forbidden to take their wives to Tibet. Though no such preventive documentary evidence is available as yet, it is quite intriguing to note that none of the Nepalese merchants, envoys or officials were accompanied by their wives. There seems some plausible reasons for this trend. First of all, journey to Tibet was very difficult, and the situation was equally unfavourable. Secondly traders had to travel frequently from *Bhot* to *Muglan* and vice versa leaving their family behind in Tibet. Thirdly they could conveniently marry a Tibetan girl and such marriage could be advantageous to their trade also. So it is a fact that Nepalese woman seldom accompanied their spouses. Therefore most of the Nepalese residing in Tibet had married Tibetan women. Contemporary writers and travelers had recounted this fact. For instance one British officer accompanying Younghusband's mission to Tibet in 1904 had mentioned that all seven Nepalese traders at Gyantse had kept Tibetan wives (Waddell 1975: 214). Here it must be remembered that polygamy was legally and customarily accepted in both Nepal and Tibet. It is said that only a woman deserving

capital punishment was banished to Tibet. But there is no authentic evidence to verify it. Only on the basis of an unaccounted rumour that one court lady named Mathura was banished to Tibet for the alleged charge of poisoning queen Rajendra Laxmi, it can be ascertained that Nepalese women condemned with capital punishment were exiled to Tibet (Nepal B.S. 2040: 206). So in those days Nepalese women rarely traveled to Tibet.

Number of *Khacharas* in Tibet

The exact number of *Khacharas* in Tibet can not be authentically ascertained due to unavailability of systematic census and official record. Indeed, it did not occasion any serious problem in the beginning because *Khacharas* were in small number. But with the increment in trade volume and Nepalese traders' settlement in Tibet their number increased significantly. The Nepalese government never attempted to keep systematic record of *Khacharas*. When occasional dispute related to *Khachara* created diplomatic problem in Nepal during mid-Ranarchial period, only then the Nepalese government showed its concern and took measures to keep records of these half-breeds.

Letter of Chandra Shamsher dated B.S. 1970 Bhadra 18th (Sept. 1913) instructed *Vakil* of Lhasa Lal Bahadur Basnet to maintain records of birth-places, three generations of *Khacharas* and enlist any alteration in it and send one copy to him. Because in absence of proper record it was difficult to distinguish Nepalese Subjects in such cases where *Khacharas* were involved in litigation, had frequent disputes occurred in the past. So Chandra Shamsher instructed chief of Digarcha office ordering to investigate among the head of the community (*Thakalis*) about the ancestral lineage of the *Khacharas* and prepare a record.² It shows Nepal government's concern in the matter. But the measures taken were not scientific and sufficient.

According to the report, the number of *Khacharas* in Kerung, Kuti, Digarcha and Lhasa were respectively 80, 248, 112, and 183. In 1913 A.D., there were 24 and 40 *Khacharas* respectively in Gamti and Chitau villages. Likewise the total number of *Khacharas* in Rongpale, Derong, Sunkha, Dahi, Labara and Koga was 122 and there were 59 *Khacharas* in the rest part of Tibet (Nepal B.S. 2045: 210-12). However, except these numbers in certain localities, the total number of *Khacharas* in whole Tibet has not been yet confirmed and no such record has been found yet. According to the account of British diplomat Charles Bell (1924: 233) who was in Tibet during 1920s, there were around 600/700 Nepali traders and approximately 1000

Khacharas. It is speculated that the number of *Khacharas* towards 1956 were more than two thousand.

Khacharas' Occupation

The Tibetan born Nepalese were settled in almost all business centres of Tibet and had varied occupation. As these people were the offspring's of Nepalese traders, it was natural that they adopted business profession. Half-breeds had even placed themselves as notable traders in Lhasa, Gyantse, Shigatse, Yatung, Kuti and Kerrung. One of the records of B.S. 1960 (1903 A.D.) indicates that the Nepalese *Khacharas* had owned at least twenty three trading houses throughout Tibet.³ The same sources further mentioned that Tibetan government had listed two *Khacharas* among the 14 top merchants of Tibet.

For example Rin Jin Topke and Dhorje Dhamdi were leading wool and yak tail merchants. But most of the *Khacharas* were small business men and venders as they lacked skill and opportunity. Sometimes with the implicit protection and encouragement from Nepalese officials and *Vakils*, *Khacharas* were even engaged in illegal trafficking of contraband goods such as opium and coral (Mishra 1991: 254-255). Furthermore, a number of *Khacharas* operated wine bars in different parts of Tibet. Besides trade, *Khacharas* were sometimes employed in government services also. As they could speak the Tibetan language fluently, some of them served as official bilingual interpreter at office of *Vakil* in Lhasa and Nepalese office at Gyantse.⁵ Account refers that on several occasions, they worked as secret service agent as well for Nepal government. During the Anglo-Tibetan crisis of 1903-4 *Vakil* Jit Bahadur commissioned *Khacharas* to spy on both the parties as instructed by the Nepalese government.⁶ *Vakil* reported to the Nepalese government that secret agents were hired to inquire into British activities in Yatung. During this crisis Nepalese rendered great service to the British by passing all the important secret information to British government. Jit Bahadur used Nepalese *Khacharas* to gather information about secret activities of Dorjief (Khendechaga) and surreptitious connection between Russia and Tibet. Similarly they were engaged to keep watch on the activities of Dalai Lama and the four *Kazis*. Likewise during Sino-Tibetan crisis (1908-1912), Nepal-Tibet dispute of 1928-30, *Khacharas* gathered information about secret activities of Tibet.⁷ However, as most of the *Khacharas* were uneducated and inefficient, Nepal government could not be benefit as much as was desired from their services. Not only that, sometimes it had negative

results also and the *Vakils* were reprimanded by the government for the wrong information.⁸ On the whole with a few exceptions not many of the *Khacharas* were in any remarkable positions.

Due to negligent and irresponsible attitude of Nepalese traders towards their *Khachara* offsprings, they were deprived of not only paternal property but also education, training and guidance. So only a few were in prestigious government and mercantile services. Rest of them were mostly shepherds, porters and labourers (Bista 1980: 1-20). Where as the situation of Nepalese born people in Tibet was entirely different. Almost all of these people were wealthy enough and were leading prestigious lives as *Mahajans* and government officers.

Nepal Government's policy towards *Khacharas*

During all phases of Nepal-Tibet relations, the striking feature of Nepalese governmental policy towards *Khacharas* was of exploitation and lack of concern for the protection of rights and welfare of *Khacharas*. *Khacharas* were politically ignored, economically exploited and socially discarded by both Nepal and Tibet. Nepal government acknowledged them as Nepalese subjects only to exact tax and free labour from them. Indeed, Nepalese officials in Tibet always supported *Khacharas* in case of any dispute between *Khacharas* and Tibetans but it was for their own vested interests rather than any consideration for *Khacharas*. Even their legitimate grievances were ignored and justice was denied to them by Nepalese government. On several occasions, *Khacharas* had complained to Rana prime minister against the maltreatment by Nepalese officials but to no avail. For instance, *Khacharas and Makajans* (merchants) petitioned against *Vakil* Malika Prasad and that case was heard by the head *Kazi* of the quinquennial mission to China (Mishra 1984: 5). But no conclusive result of that trial is known.

In yet another instance Kaziman and Norbu Chhiring came to Nepal to plead before Chandra Shamsher against *Vakil* Jit Bahadur Khatri with the petition signed by 70 *Khacharas*. According to the petition, he was alleged to have not paid for the transportation of 50 packs of luggage. When inquired, he claimed that the load was only five or six bags. However, Chandra Shamsher made him pay for all the 50 bags. At the same time he cautioned the *Vakil* that all Nepalese subjects in Tibet must be exacted customary dues only and administered fairly by *Vakil's* office without any undue harassment, otherwise the later would not be able to maintain the dignity of the office.⁹ Though Chandra Shamsher reprimanded the *Vakil*, no further action was

taken against him. One of the reasons behind the dismissal of Jit Bahadur could be his attitude towards *Khacharas* but definitely that was not the only cause. This seems to be the single instance when *Khacharas* had come to Nepal to secure justice because only few could afford such a costly venture. Notwithstanding the report of Jit Bahadur that except the case of Norbu Chhiring, no other complaint was ever known, it can hardly be believed. Mostly *Khacharas* were simple and uneducated so they dared not venture to complain against the local officials and at any case if they did, so their plea was arbitrarily dismissed and not registered at all. That is why such records are very rare. Of course only on the basis of one or two such cases it can not be substantiated that the *Khacharas* were always oppressed and exploited by all the *Vakils*. None the less Nepal governments statutory neglect in this regard not only made justice unattainable to them but also subjected them to the exploitation by Nepalese officials in Tibet.

Down to mid-20th century Nepal formulated no consistent policy for the welfare of *Khacharas*. For centuries, they were accustomed to such neglect. But the report of Jit Bahadur shows that with the opening of 20th century they were slowly awakening to rationalize their discontent on the legitimate grounds. However, their consternation was caused much by economic hardship rather than legitimacy of entitlement or any political aspirations. As already mentioned, the most galling feature of *Khachara* system was that they were dispossessed of the paternal property. According to the report of *Vakil* Jit Bahadur, in case of death of a Nepalese merchant in Tibet his property was bequeathed to the descendent only from Nepalese side. Article related to heir-less property stipulates that in case of the death of a merchant without legitimate heir the property of the deceased merchant was to be deposited to national treasury even if the *Khachara* offspring of the deceased merchant was alive. Only the descendent from the marriage among *Khacharas* could inherit the property of *Khachara* parents. The report further states that *Khacharas* generally bemoaned that neglected by both Nepal and Tibet they were left in lurch. The main resentment among the *Khacharas* was that they had worked equally hard in paternal earnings. So they did not deserve to be deprived of the paternal property and live in wretched condition. What they wanted was a small share of the paternal property.⁹ But Nepal government never took any significant measure to improve the general condition of *Khacharas*.

Tibetan government was naturally not disposed to treat *Khacharas* sympathetically as they were deemed Nepalese subjects. So *Khacharas* could

feel bondage towards neither Tibet nor Nepal. Only if, Nepal government had acknowledged partial inheritance right, Nepal could have commanded more allegiance. To comprehend *Khachara* problem in true perspective, it should be remembered that if a high caste Nepalese married even a woman of low caste, the descendents were entitled to share paternal property (Khanal B.S. 2026: 153-55). Therefore such discrimination for *Khacharas* alienated them from Nepal.

The *Khacharas* remained obligated in various ways to Nepal government, they were taxed two tanka (equivalent to six annas) annually in live or the facilities granted by the government. Likewise they had to pay death tax of 12 annas for *sota khata* and eight annas in cash. *Khacharas* were liable to pay two *kala mohar* to *Vakil* as gift or *salami* (as other trad. s) while changing their regular place of trading. This money was regarded as the private purse of the *Vakil* and not deposited in national treasury. Even for being Buddhist monk (Banda), besides the dues of one *khata* and two *black mohars* permission of the *Vakil* was also mandatory. Though they were deemed to be Nepalese subjects, they were charged eight annas for their passport to Nepal and had to pay other dues like any other foreign trader.¹⁰ Apart from such taxes, they were subjected to obligatory free labour and other such exploitations. Due to such unsympathetic and discriminating attitude, Nepal could not succeed in wining the minds of *Khachara* citizens even after centuries and *Khacharas* were gradually alienated and finally repudiated their connection with China in 1956.

The Attitude of Tibetan Government Towards *Khacharas*

The social behaviour of a country is generally determined by different conditioning factors. The long traditional ties constituted the basic framework of Nepal-Tibet relations which was further conditioned in expression by the different treaties and pacts between them. The resulting outcome of these factors was expressed more obviously in terms of Tibetan governmental policy towards *Khacharas*. Tibet was intensely jealous of extra-territorial rights enjoyed by Nepal in Tibet. The most humiliating provision of it being *Khachara* system which injured their national pride. So Tibet was naturally not only unsympathetic but hostile to *Khacharas*. Her antagonism towards *Khacharas* was manifested in various ways. They were usually harassed and unduly taxed. Flouting the treaty stipulations, they were often tried in Tibetan court without referring to Nepalese officials in Tibet. Of course, the fact that *Khacharas* were engaged in illegal trade of contraband goods under the

protection of Nepalese officials also served as an extra-irritant. Moreover, Tibetans had always resented that in case of dispute between Tibetan subjects and *Khacharas*, the Nepalese officials, disregarding the evidence always justified *Khacharas*. Such irritants were also responsible to generating negative attitude of Tibetan government as well as public towards *Khacharas*.

So *Khacharas* were occasional victims of Tibetan hostilities. Many times their houses and properties were ravaged. Though sometimes they were indemnified by Tibetan government when protested by Nepalese *Vakil*, mostly they were not atoned for the loss. Notwithstanding the fact that in 1883 the Tibetan government compensated Nepalese traders including *Khacharas* for the damage of their property and life, there are many instances when, despite repeated protests from Nepalese *Vakil*, Tibetan government had not responded. Such incidents were quite frequent up to as late as the 3rd decade of 20th century (Mishra B.S. 1953: 12-25).

Defying customary convention, Nepalese traders were subjected to custom duty for exporting goods to India via Phari trade route, after it was opened in 1904. This strained Nepal-Tibet relations. Consequently *Khacharas* had to suffer great loss in trade. When protested, their goods were confiscated by Tibetan government Nepalese *Vakil* even pleaded to Panchen Lama when nothing came out of prolonged correspondence with Tibetan officials. But all the overtures of Nepalese *Vakil* failed and at last it was established that Nepalese merchants were liable to pay customs duty on exporting goods to India via Phari.¹¹

Dispute occurred when Tibetan government tried to levy tax on wine bars of *Khacharas*. Nepalese *Vakil* vehemently objected to this as he was instructed by the government that according to the convention Nepal was authorized to collect tax upon wine bars of *Khacharas*. Another dispute was regarding house rent Many *Khacharas* lived in rented house and Tibet did not hesitate to take the slightest pretext to express her malice towards *Khacharas*. It was a conventionally accepted regulation that as long as the Nepalese tenants paid the rent of the house regularly, Tibetan landlord could not dislodge them. According to Lhasa record book, Tibetan government had no demand over Nepalese subjects merchants, *Khacharas* and muslims except the agreed amount of rent and Tibetan landlord could not oust Nepalese tenants even if they were offered higher rent by Tibetans.¹² But contrary to the norms the *Khacharas* were some times expelled unceremoniously from the house though they paid their rent regularly.¹³

To harass *Khacharas*, Tibetan government enforced a new tax called *Amata* and compulsory free labour upon wives and daughters of *Khacharas*. Though this was against the prevailing convention. According to Chandra Shamsher's instruction to *Vakil Lal Bahadur*, in this regard, wives and daughters of Nepalese subjects were exempted from any taxation or obligation towards Tibet as long as they stayed with Nepalese subjects. In a similar incident earlier, an attempt of Tibetan government to tax wives and daughters of *Khacharas* had triggered the conflict between Nepal and Tibet in the year B.S. 1766.¹⁴ After long negotiation with Kasyal it had been settled then that Tibet had no authority over them. So Chandra Shamsher ordered *Vakil* to follow the same precedence. On the basis of this letter it had been argued that wife and daughter of a *Khachara* were rendered the same status as the *Khachara* himself.¹⁵ Notwithstanding the fact that they enjoyed such protection from Nepal government as long as they lived with the Nepalese subject, they were denied the status of Nepalese subjects. Tibetan government, nevertheless, often violated this convention and tended to harass them by extra-taxation and forced labour.

According to the treaty of 1856, it had been accepted for all practical purpose that any dispute between a Nepalese and Tibetan subject was to be decided by the joint judiciary committee of Nepal and Tibet. But it is evidenced that defying the treaty obligation they used to punish *Khacharas* arbitrarily. For example in 1929 one *Khachara* was whipped 200 times and detained for three days for the breach of a local tradition.¹⁶

For centuries Nepal had enjoyed the special prerogatives and position in Tibet. But with the opening of Tibet to British influence the equation and equilibrium had been shifting. So Tibet was not willing anymore to accommodate her policy according to the traditional pattern. And this behavioural change in her mood was expressed more oftenly in her attitude towards *Khacharas*. However, geopolitical determinism, historical affinity, political considerations were the predominant factors that suggested Tibet to pursue the same structural framework up to 1956.

Chinese Policy Towards *Khacharas*

From the ancient period Tibet was directly or indirectly under Chinese sphere of influence (barring for few decades of 20th century). Although, Chinese authority in Tibet remained vague and nebulous in practice, Chinese paternalistic position was never challenged. Physical distance, difficult transport and communication made it difficult for China to assert her

influence consistently in Tibet. Taking advantage of this Nepal had increased her influence, indeed, taking special care not to offend China or to challenge her objectives in Tibet in any way. Nepal had diplomatically adjusted her policy towards Tibet to accommodate Chinese interest and position in Tibet. So China also was favourably disposed towards the special interest of Nepal in Tibet as long as Nepalese interest did not clash with Chinese interests and objectives. So Chinese attitude towards *Khacharas* was not specifically underlined. Though *Khacharas* were sometimes harassed by Chinese officials residing in Tibet, that was their personal doings not the governmental manouvering.

However, Trans-Himalayan political development of early 20th century brought a significant change in policy of China towards Tibet. This had great bearing in Chinese attitude not only towards *Khacharas* but Nepalese as a whole. Specially during Sino-Tibetan crisis of 1908-12 China often tended to undermine the long established privileges and prerogatives of Nepal in Tibet openly.

Defying the prevailing convention Chinese authorities in Tibet arbitrarily imposed tax upon *Khacharas*, interfered in internal litigation among *Khacharas*, arbitrated the judicial case between *Khacharas* and Tibetan locals without intimating Nepalese authorities. Nepalese government repeatedly protested against such oberbearing attitude of Chinese authorities. But Chinese government completely disregarded it. There are several instances when Chinese authorities deliberately pestered *Khacharas* for trivial offences and coerced them to unpaid labour.¹⁷ According to the conventional usage, *Khacharas* had to salute Chinese Ambans. But there are instances when they were forced to kowtow (to kneel down). Nepalese were now required to take passport and license for gun from Yamun (office of Chinese officials Ambans). During Sino-Tibetan crisis Chinese authorities in Tibet has requested Nepalese *Vakil* Jit Bahadur for the permission of recruitment of *Khacharas* in Chinese army. The Nepalese *Vakil* not only refuse this but debarred *Khacharas* from joining Chinese army voluntarily. In complete disregard of this Chinese enrolled *Khacharas* in Chinese army.¹⁸ However, after some times for unexplained reasons all the *Khacharas* defected Chinese army. All these were but a few examples of deliberate manouveration of Chinese authorities to mitigate Nepalese influence in Tibet. but after revolution of 1911-12 which overthrew Manchu dynastic monarchy and established Republic, China was preoccupied in her own internal politics and for some time could not pursue assertive policy towards Tibet. Taking

advantage of this Tibet expelled Chinese officials from her soil. This consequently affected Chinese influence in Tibet for sometimes. During this time China's relation with Nepal also was passive. Probably that is why after 1912 the documents related to *Khacharas* do not speak about Chinese involvement in it.

Social Condition of *Khacharas*

Complex *Khacharas* system originated in 17th century had since then caused considerable influence in many aspect of Nepal-Tibet relations extending from 17th century to 1956. Much has been written about Nepal Tibet relations. But so far there has been no attempt to focus on *Khacharas*, their social condition, culture, tradition etc. Unavailability of documents and evidences is quite understandable and this makes the comprehensive study of the subject quite difficult. However, some related description of social condition of the *Khacharas* has been outlined below.

Interesting fact about *Khacharas* is that only the descendents of Nepalese merchant of Newar community were leveled *Khacharas*. Sherpas and other inhabitants of northern border of Nepal also conducted trade in Tibet and married Tibetan woman but their offspring were not called *Khacharas* and not much about them is known. Though *Khacharas* were socially exploited by Nepalese government they enjoyed certain privileges and exemption from taxation in Tibet. And it seems that descendent of other ethnic communities except Newar were denied such privileges.

It appears that customarily not all the *Khacharas* adopted paternal surnames. Completely cut off from the paternal society thin acculturation process was predominantly influenced by Tibetan social norms. Almost all *Khacharas* were Buddhist. *Khacharas* were permitted even to become monk provided that there were more than one brother in the family. It can be said that to some extent *Khacharas* enjoyed religious tolerance. Though most of the Nepalese officials in Tibet were Hindus, it was not mandatory for *Khacharas* to observe Hindu socio-religious festivals such as *Dashahara*. Following Tibetan funeral tradition, *Khacharas* used to cut the corps into pieces and feed to scavenger. Chandra Shamsher tried to reform this custom. He directed *Vakil* to order *Khacharas* to bury the dead body.¹⁹

It was hard to distinguish between *Khachara* and local Tibetan as they were usually similar in appearance and features. So Chinese officials had often arrested *Khacharas* by mistake. Hence the Nepalese government circulated a regulation that *Khacharas* should wear Nepalese cap.²⁰ However,

it is yet doubtful that the regulation was strictly followed. Childless Newar merchant in Tibet could not adopt his own *Khachara* son as *Khacharas* were debarred from entitlement of paternal property. However, a childless *Khachara* could adopt another *Khachara* as son.²¹

It was customary to nominate one head of the clan or *Thakali* among the Nepalese traders in Tibet. In Gyantse, government used to appoint one official as *Thakali* since 1905 (Mishra 1989: 9-17). But in other parts of Tibet old tradition of *Thakali* selection prevailed. *Thakali* of *Khachara* were nominated from the *Khacharas* themselves. Newar merchant *Thakali* was exempted from "gyan panji" Tax. But for *Khachara Thakali* there was no extra privilege, as *gyan panji* was not levied upon *Khacharas*.²²

Khacharas had their own *guthi* in Tibet. They had to donate some amount according to their conciliation to the *guthi* for becoming monk. It was customary to organize feast for *Khacharas* on behalf of the government to celebrate *holi*. Similarly on return to Lhasa from China the head of quinque social mission to China had to give Rs. 29 to *Khacharas* for feast. On death of the King of Nepal they were required to observe mourning formalities like other Nepalese citizens.²³ It is recorded that on death of King Prithvi they performed the traditional mourning rituals for 13 days and observed mourning for a period of 45 days.²⁴

Due to scant information about *Khacharas* in both Nepalese and Tibetan documents the study about them is not very clear. On the basis of few scattered information it seems that their social structure characterized specifically Buddhism with the elements of Tibetan culture and only a superficial influence of Nepalese traditions.

According to the dynastic chronicles, the treaty of Pratap Malla established office in Kuti to look after such matters as the issue of *Khachara* offspring of Nepalese traders and the property of deceased Nepalese traders in Tibet. In due course of time this office was subsequently upgraded as Lhasa *Vakil* Office.²⁵

As already mentioned there was no serious problem in the beginning as *Khacharas* were not numerous. But as they grew in numbers, *Khacharas* dispute not only troubled Nepalese government, it also became a regular deterrent in Nepal-Tibet relations. The fundamental cause of it was the Tibetan resentment for the unwanted position accorded to the *Khacharas* in Tibet. Documents shows that at times, Tibetan authorities had requested Nepalese government to check unruly and aggressive behaviour of *Khacharas*. They complained that *Khacharas* violated socio-religious

customs of land and harassed the Tibetans. One of the main accusations labeled against *Khacharas* was that they used to carry contraband trade under the protection of Nepalese authorities in Lhasa and Gyantse (Bell 1924: 230-35). But Nepal government does not seem to have taken such objections seriously. Such apathetic attitude of Nepal government generated deep rooted distrust and jealousy for the *Khacharas*. But of course it must be taken into account that the complaints were not always true and rational. Some times they were fabricated and exaggerated just out of jealousy.

Nepal government naturally favoured growth of *Khacharas* in Tibet as she benefited economically from taxes, fines and other financial dues levied upon *Khacharas*. But more important than that it provided great leverage to her in Tibet. *Khacharas* also preferred to be Nepalese subjects as they were exempted from harsher taxes and laws of Tibetan government. Therefore, the objective of Tibetan policy was to harass *Khacharas* so as to contain their activities in Tibet.

From the beginning of 20th century, the pattern of Nepal's relations with Tibet underwent gradual change as the result of two major developments—first the active interest of British in Tibet following the so called British "era of commercial optimism" in Tibet and secondly, decline of Chinese power. Both the factors prompted Tibet to undermine Nepalese prerogatives in Tibet which caused frequent misunderstandings and disputes. Tibetans turned more assertive and less compliant towards Nepalese. Tibetan government demanded that Tibetan government should be permitted to collect tax from *Khacharas* on behalf of the Nepalese government so as to check the unruly and aggressive behaviour of *Khacharas* in Tibet (Upreti 1980: 146). They requested Nepalese government to keep records of birth and death of *Khacharas*. From the contemporary correspondence it appears that they had even approached Nepalese government for an arrangement whereby *Khacharas* should become Tibetan citizens after a certain time interval. Nepal government, quite aware of Tibetan motive, had no intention to compromise its traditional position so did not entertain any propositions. This strained Nepal-Tibet relations. Again Tibetan government offered an alternative proposal that the dues payable by *Khacharas* be increased to five times which was to be delivered by Tibetan government to Nepal on condition that *Khacharas* should be subjected to the Tibetan jurisdiction (Prem 1980: 1407). But Nepal government remained silent in this matter. When all these overtures of Tibetan government failed, Kazi Charrung visited Nepal ostensibly to pay homage to Nepalese shrines but actually to negotiate

the *Khachara* question. Kazi proposed that after two generations in Tibet, the 3rd generation *Khachara* should be naturalized as Tibetan citizen (Mishra B S. 2043: 30-40). But Nepal government was reluctant to relinquish any of the traditional privileges. So all this proved abortive.

The main object of Nepal's policy in Tibet was to defend customary prerogatives secured by the previous treaties which were now being challenged by Tibetan government. The psychological as well as real effect of Tibetan jealousy was manifested in her dealings towards *Khacharas*. Tibet assumed openly hostile attitude towards *Khacharas* and arbitrarily subjected them to the laws and taxation of the land. Nepal government vehemently protested this high handed action of Tibetan government. But all the deliberations were unpropitious. This intensified the dispute to the extent that the war became eminent during 1928-30.

End of *Khachara* System

Nepal's formal diplomatic contact with China was obstructed after the fall of Manchu dynasty in 1911. However, three simultaneous political developments of mid 20th century— a) withdrawal of British from India b) end of Ranarchy in Nepal and c) establishment of communist republic in china (1949) obliged Nepal to co-ordinate her diplomatic relations with her immediate neighbours in accordance to the changed political scenario of the region. Communist China claimed sovereignty over Tibet and India formally conceded to it by 1952. Though Tibet was paying annual tribute of Rs. 100,000 until 1953, contemplating closer diplomatic relations with China, Nepal was required to accommodate her position vis-à-vis Tibet.

In 1954, Nepal expressed her desire to establish direct relations with China. China reciprocated it, giving stress in "Panchaseel" during Bandung conference in 1955. On August 1, 1956 both the countries agreed to establish diplomatic relations on the basis of fundamental principles of Panchasheel as guidelines for the relations. Accordingly Sino-Nepalese treaty was signed on 20th September 1956 and ratified on January 17, 1958. Article 3 of this treaty abrogated all the treaties and documents which existed in the past between Nepal and China including those between the Tibet region of China and Nepal. This automatically terminated all the rights and privileges of Nepal in Tibet. New commercial arrangements were made on reciprocal basis- old office were replaced by new commercial agencies, marketing points were specified, exchange of consulates general was arranged (Bhasin 1970: 185-191).

According to the article 14 of the treaty all the Nepalese residing in Tibet region of China were subjected to Chinese jurisdiction. Clause stipulated that all the people residing in Tibet and above 18 years were free to accept Chinese citizenship for themselves and their children on fulfilling prevalent legal formalities of Chinese government after which Nepalese citizenship would be automatically nullified though it was not mandatory *Khacharas* overwhelmingly accepted Chinese citizenship.

Khachara problem was one of the major disturbing factors in Nepal-Tibet relations. It mainly originated from the complex and peculiar *Khachara* system itself. Nepal always wanted Tibet to be responsive to Nepal's commercial needs. For this no measure could have been as effective as *Khachara* system. Nepalese traders could marry Tibetan woman, have children and use them for economic advantage without bearing any social obligation and economic responsibility. Perhaps, at first for the fear of leaving Nepalese human resources and property in Tibet, *Khacharas* were denied inheritance on parental properties. Population of Nepalese subjects was increased in Tibet which served Nepal, paid tax to Nepal but had no socio-economic or political claim whatsoever upon Nepal. *Khachara* system tremendously contributed to expand Nepalese commerce and influence in Tibet. But the whole *Khachara* concept lacked moral concern, social commitment and economic accountability on part of Nepalese government. On the other hand *Khacharas* being socially economically as well as politically burdensome to Tibetan government were the subject of their hatred and jealousy. Disdained by both Tibet and Nepal the *Khacharas* were morally and psychologically unattached to both Tibet and Nepal. Some share in paternal property, little concern and timely reformations by Nepal would have earned their respect, loyalty and bondage. But for centuries Nepal neglected their economic security, social status and political aspirations. So when offered alternative they preferred to adopt Chinese citizenship. For centuries *Khachara* system had influenced not only the diplomatic intercourse but also the commercial relation with Nepal. Nonetheless at last it ended rather abruptly.

Notes

1. For the clauses of these treaties, see Leo E. Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 43; 64-65; 114-115.
2. Chandra Shumshere to Lal Bahadur Basnet, B.S. 1970 Bhadra 18 (September 1913), Poka No. 90, Foreign Ministry Archives of Nepal.

3. *Lhasako Dastur Kitap*, Foreign Ministry Archives of Nepal.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Commandari Kitabkhana Record*, B.S. 1960-1980, National Archives of Nepal.
6. Petition of Jit Bahadur from Lhasa, B.S. 1971, Srawan 14 (July 1914), Foreign Ministry Archives of Nepal, Poka No. 206.
7. *ibid.*
8. The information furnished by Nepalese envoy Jit Bahadur regarding the secret alliance between Tibet and Russia proved wrong. For detail, see Mishra, *op.cit.*, f.n. 10, pp. 67-87.
9. *Lhasa ko Dastur Kitap*, *op.cit.*, f.n. 8.
10. For the Phari route trade crisis, see Mishra, *op.cit.*, f.n. 10, pp. 230-239.
11. *Lhasako Dastur Kitap*, *op.cit.*, f.n. 8
12. The Nepalese half-breed named Aane was expelled from the house of a Tibetan without proper ground, Lal Bahadur to Chandra Shumshere, B.S. 1969 Falgun 3 (February 1913), Poka No. 80, Foreign Ministry Archives of Nepal.
13. Nepal, *op.cit.*, f.n.6, p. 224.
14. *ibid.*
15. Mishra, *op.cit.*, f.n. 10, pp. 203-04.
16. For the Phari route trade crisis, See Mishra, *op.cit.*, f.n. 10, pp. 230-239.
17. The Chinese highhandedness ove the Nepalese in Tibet is analysed in Mishra, *op.cit.*, f.n. 10, pp. 134-38.
18. *ibid.*
19. Order of Chandra Shumshere to the Nepalese Vakil at Lhasa, B.S. 1968, Kartik 11 (November 1911), Poka No. 88, Foreign Ministry Archives of Nepal.
20. Lhasa ko Dastur Kitap, *op.cit.*, n.f. 8.
21. *ibid.*
22. *Lhasa ko Dastur Kitap*, *op.cit.*, f.n. 8
23. *ibid.*
24. Petition of Jit Bahadur, B.S. 1968, Magh 3 (January 1912), Poka No. 55, Foreign Ministry Archives of Nepal.
25. Khanal , *op.cit.*, f.n. 23, p. 4.

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