

Report-I

Tibetan Settlements in Thangboche and Jawalakhel*

Background

Following the exile of the His Holiness Dalai Lama, many Tibetans embraced exile and settled in Nepal, India and Bhutan. The Tibetans and the Nepalese have always had historical and cultural links with Tibet. With the increase of Tibetan population, the Government of Nepal allowed the Tibetans to settle in Nepal and the Home Ministry coordinated to formulate the policies for relief and the rehabilitation of the Tibetans. Red Cross, UNHCR, ICRC, SRC, US AID Mission and other non-government agencies came for the assistance of the Tibetan refugees in Nepal. After the initial stages of relief measures, land was acquired for settlements in the name of Nepal Red Cross to resettle and rehabilitate the Tibetans in camps in different parts of Nepal.

ICRC established the first settlement in Nepal in November 1960 at Jawalakhel in Kathmandu with the objectives of extending accommodation to the Tibetan refugees and providing them training opportunities in handicraft to help them become self supporting and preserve their national identity. Post 1963, ICRC handed over the responsibility of the relief measures to the Swiss government. Swiss Government set up camps in different parts of Nepal in Pokhara Paljorling Settlement in Dhorpatan Manang, and also completion of settlement at Solukhumbu. After the formation of the Nepal Red cross, in 1964, the Nepal Red Cross took over the responsibility of the Swiss Red Cross.

UNHCR on request of His Majesty Government, set up office in 1964. One of the first initiatives that UNHCR undertook was to resolve the problem of housing. UNHCR through its implementing partner Nepal Red Cross built houses in Jawalakhel, Pokhara and Solukhumbu settlement. Training programmes and many others relief programmes were conducted

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by assistance from UNHCR. In the presence of the many relief organizations and non government organizations, the Swiss Association Technical Cooperation was given a role to coordinate the activities to avoid possible duplication of the assistance for the Tibetans. Land was also acquired in the name of Red Cross and agreement was done with the government to keep the provisions of land in the name of the Tibetans and allow them residence till they would like to reside.

In the 1960s, seven Tibetan camps were established and three during the 1970s. A few more settlements were established in 1990s. The Tibetans are currently living in Nepal in various parts of the country from the very remote to the urban areas mostly in settlements and in clusters. The Tibetans used their skills in the carpet weaving and became one of the biggest contributors of the country's economy. Many of the carpet factories went on to become a source of employment and investment for the Nepalese people as well. Currently there are settlements in districts of Solumkhumbu, Mustang, Lalitpur, Pokhara, Rasuwa, Walung, Manang, Baglung, Tanhun and Kathmandu. Despite the challenges of living in extreme conditions and in exile they have been able to preserve their unique culture and heritage.

For the welfare of the Tibetans, particularly to make them self-reliant, and to raise the standards of the education and health care, and social activities for the Tibetans living in the settlements in Nepal, Snow Lion Foundation (SLF) was established by SATA in 1972. It was registered by the Government of Nepal under a cabinet resolution for Tibetan refugees in Nepal for the Association's Registration Act 2034. SLF manages the Tibetan schools and the health clinics. The main objectives are to fulfill its goal of providing the high quality education to the Tibetan children, health services to the Tibetans and special care for the senior citizens and those in need.

The Tibetans were allowed to stay in Nepal and were granted refugee cards till 1990. Post 1990s, the Tibetans have been allowed only to transit to India. The children of the Tibetans who have been born have not been provided the refugee cards and they are currently listed in their parents' refugee status as dependants. The refugee card allows them residence in Nepal with restrictions of employment. Most of them seek employment in offices that are run by Tibetans and in private businesses. Most records state that 20000 Tibetans are living in Nepal. The record of the Tibetan Settlements and population strength, written in the annual report 2008-2009 of the Snow Lion Foundation states that Tibetans in settlements are 13,611 in numbers in the following settlements:

Table 1: Population Distribution of Tibetans Across Various Settlements in Nepal

Settlement	Population
Namche,Solukhumbu	145
Swoyambhu,Kathmandu	1919
Kathmandu City Area	727
Namgyaling, Mustang	278
Deleking,Solukhumbu	486
Samdupling,Jawalakhel	1082
Tashipaikhel,Pokhara	913
Gegeling,Rasuwa	181
Tashigang,Pokhara	62
Paljorling,Pokhara	368
Jampaling,Tanahun	615
Sampheling,Walung	318
Tashiling,Pokhara	655
Manang	293
Nubri	57
Noziling,dhorpatan	210
Boudha and Jorpati	5250
Others	52
Total	13611

Source: Annual Report 2008-2009 Snow Lion Foundation

The main objective of this report is to document the lives of people in these settlements, and how their available livelihood options has been responsible for their assimilation and generated employment opportunities for the Nepalese as well. In this report, I discuss the life in urban settlements like Jawalakeh, Lalitpur and experience of living in rural settlement like Thangboche settlement in Rasuwa. Having lived in exile for more than 50 years, the settlements have been following various livelihood measures that are available to them, considering the setting of the settlements and the environment. The handicraft center at Jawalakhel is a pioneer of carpet weaving business. The handicraft centre soon became a flourishing business and the carpet movement spread throughout the country not only in the other settlements but also throughout the country where people starting being involved in the enterprises. Tibetan carpet factory brought lots of revenue to the state coffers and also generated employment for Nepalese and Tibetans.

Thangboche, Rasuwa

The settlement of Thangboche is situated at an altitude of 5100 feet in the rural part of North Western Nepal. The settlement lies in Chilime VDC and is very near to the Chilime Hydro power station and also falls in the Langtang trail. The settlement was formed thirty eight years back after purchasing land from Mingmar Lama, Norbu Jyamo, Thili Wangdue and Wangdue Tamang. It is registered in the name of the Nepal Red Cross Society. The land was registered in the name of NRC and Tibetans received the rights of residence. The total area comprises of 6 ropanies, 14 annas and one paisa. The Tibetans that were scattered in various parts of Rasuwa were resettled in the newly purchased land and moved to Thangboche. Initially 10 houses were constructed and the residents were involved in construction and were provided wages for their contribution. The daily wages used to be Rs 4 for males and Rs 3 for females. As more settlers poured in during the construction it was not adequate and the houses were allocated on lottery basis. More houses were constructed at a later stage of settlement.

The current demographic data of the settlement comprising of 81 people is as follows:

Table 2: Demographic Profile of People in Thangboche

Age	Male	Female
0-5	1	2
5-17	4	11
18-59	8	14
Above 60	5	6
<i>Total</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>33</i>

In this settlement, people above 60 years of age receive stipend from the various organizations such as Hope, Snow Lion Foundation, Department of Home and the Khampa camp at Kathmandu. They vary from Rs 450 to Rs 1000 per month. The community elects a member of the community as their representative called *methue*. It is done on annual and rotation basis as many people will get the opportunity to represent the community. As the community is small, there is only one representative. In case of any problem, the *methue* communicates the problems and concerns of the people with the settlement office. The settlement officer and his office is in charge of the overall management.

The children of the settlement go to the Shermei Wanghel School at Syabru, Rasuwa. The school that is under the management of the Snow Lion Foundation has currently one hundred and ninety six students from Thangboche and other areas of Rasuwa. Currently there are six staff members. The children of the settlement go to the school and stay at the

hostel as most of them come from remote settlements like Thangboche and are unable to come to the school every day. All the children of the settlement have sponsors who are funding their education. Shermei Wanghel School is a primary school. After the completion of the primary education the children will go to the secondary and high schools in Kathmandu for the completion of their education. The health clinic is situated at the Syabru settlement and it caters to the needs of the Tibetans living in the Rasuwa district and is also open to Nepalese patients. Community health workers provide the services in the settlement clinic. Also Tibetan medicine facilities are available in the settlement.

Most of the people of Thangboche are engaged in weaving aprons. It is a part of traditional attire and is very popular in the northern part of Nepal used by the Tamang women in Langtang and most Tibetan women. Most of the weavers have their weave in their households and some of the old people help in making the rolls of thread and wool for weaving. Some make belts and small bags that can be sold in nearby handicraft stores and market in Syabru. Some male members even travel to remote areas of Langtang where there is a demand for the aprons. The women weave and the male members travel to different places where they can find a market. The male members of the family go to the Langtang area, remote areas and villages to sell these products. Such tours last a month and they even sell on credit and collect when they go next time to the villages. A few households have opened shops which cater to the houses in the settlement and also to the nearby Tamang villages. The market for the shops is very limited as the numbers of buyers are very small in number. Most of the stock is brought in credit from the shops in the district headquarter. The profit is the small mark up which the households earn. The houses are in clusters and the lands that have been allocated to the household are only small kitchen gardens where they can grow some green vegetables and tomatoes. For the elderly and aged people the occupation they used to follow were of nomads. They used to graze livestock in the nearby hills and mountains. Nowadays due to the old age they are unable to do so. They are currently spending their lives and are dependent on their children and also the stipend that the settlement office provides. For the old aged the annual renewal of the refugee card becomes troublesome as they have to travel to the district headquarters far away in person to do that.

Due to the nearby Chilime Hydro power station, motor able road has reached the settlement. The land prices have gone up very rapidly and as the village falls in the Langtang trail, trekking route, more lodges are mushrooming and soon the small clusters of small Tibetan household will find themselves in a more bustling environment and things will never remain the same.

Jawalakhel Settlement

Samdupling Settlement at Jawalakhel adjacent to the ring road of Kathmandu was established in 1960 by the International committee for the Red Cross. The settlement was formed with the contribution of land from the government, construction of houses by SATA, Australia Refugee committee and UNHCR. The land of the settlement is in the name of the Red cross.

The Jawalakhel handicraft center was established and registered in 1965. The premises of the handicraft center has small *gumba* on the right, a four storied building and warehouses. A four massive structure houses the various departments of the handicraft center and its administration. On the premises is also the Jawalakhel cooperative offices and the shops that run on its management.

The settlement officer is responsible for the management of the settlement and there are three elected members from the community who are called the *thume*. They are involved in the decision making of the jawalakhel handicraft center. The community also elects 15 members called *thojok* who are elected from the community. They are involved in the welfare activities of the settlement. The elected members coordinate with the settlements about the welfare office and the meetings take place regularly and also when required.

The total population of the Jawalakhel settlement is 1082. Most of the population lives just across the street from the handicraft center. The staff of the center resides in the staff quarters. Many residences have been renovated with the support from the European Union. Some people still live in rent and also live around the gompa and the school areas. They all live in nuclear families but the houses are attached to each other. So the people are living close together and most of them are in close contact with each other. The old aged home that is supported by the Snow lion foundation and the Jawalakhel cooperative. It houses seventeen old aged people.

The Tibetan cooperative society was established as a multipurpose cooperative for the Tibetans in Jawalakhel settlement. It was established in the year 1966. Initially the cooperative used to do programs in subsidized food stalls for the community as then the food markets were not in the close vicinity. Later it ventured into poultry farming and other small businesses. Currently it is running the handicraft stores and has more two hundred and twenty five members. The handicraft store sells the antiques, handicrafts and curios. The cooperative is managed by a board comprising of eleven members. The community members elect the board members and the term of the board is for three years. The board is responsible for the management of the cooperative society. It coordinates with the three community leaders who are also involved in the welfare of the community. The income of the

cooperative is used for the old aged home, maintaining the clinic and the administration of the cooperative. The profit of the cooperative is distributed to the shareholders during the Tibetan New year Losar every year.

Norbulingka sports club (norbulingka social welfare organization) was established in 1972 has begun to emphasize more on the social and cultural activities. It has initiated to organise the programmes in the field of education and environment. It is a forum for the youth to interact. Atisha Primary school under the management of the Snow Lion Foundation has seventy six students and is running classes from LKG to class V. There is a small crèche in the area which is for the working mothers of the settlement so that they can work freely during the work hours. The Snow Lion Foundation has a clinic in Boudha and in Jawalakhel area which is open six days a week. It caters to the Tibetan and as well as the Nepalese people. Kailash Medical and Astro society provide Tibetan medicines in most of the settlements and it is popular among the old aged people.

The major activity of the handicraft center has been the carpet weaving, which has been generating livelihoods for many members of the community. Due to the handicraft centre, one hundred and eighty three Tibetans are getting employment in various categories of production and administration. In exile, women have adapted to the demanding role of working both within and outside the house to supplement the family income. It is now fully accepted that wives and mothers work to supplement the family income. Most of the workers of the handicraft center are women.

Among the first generation of workers, most of them had the skill to weave carpets while a couple of them were trained for carpet weaving in the Small cottage industries at New Road forty years back. The first generation of weavers transferred their skills to other women and they became master weavers. For the carpet production, the wool is brought from Tibet and New Zealand. The wool is spun into thread by twenty four spinners. The spun thread is sent for dyeing and then it needs to be dried. After the dyed thread is dry it is ready to be rolled and rolling is done by fifty seven old women. After thread is rolled it is sent to the weavers. 72 weavers under the design of two graphic artists and two carpet masters weave intricate design. All the carpet weavers are women and they have learnt the skill from their mothers, older workers and also through carpet masters. The carpet weavers most of them are not educated and followed the skills that their parents had and got transformed to them which they are still using to work. Their children go to the schools and they don't see the next generation weaving carpets like them after being educated in the schools. The working hours are from 8am to 5pm, with one hour lunch break. The carpet masters check the designs twice a day. It usually takes the weavers a month to make the carpets. After the weaving of the carpet is finished it is sent for washing and trimming. After the carpet becomes a

finished product it is sent either to the export section for the courier and cargo and the show room for sales to domestic and international buyers who come to visit the center. The handicraft center is a popular destination amongst the tourists in Kathmandu.

The annual production of the carpet is 860 square meters and for those 2427 kgs of yarn is required. The carpet weaving wages vary from Rs3692 per square meter for 100 knot carpet to Rs1349 per 60 knots. The yarn spinning rates also vary from Rs 101 to 191 per square meter and the helpers receive wages of Rs 65 per day. The handicraft centre has been responsible for the self reliance of the Tibetan settlement and carpet factory has brought high numbers of self reliant Tibetans in the community. The settlement has become one of the successful cases of rehabilitation of the settlement in an urban setting. Many people of the settlement are running small businesses in the nearby areas. Due to the urban setting the settlers have more opportunities than other settlements in the country but due to the employment restriction many educated youth are still unemployed.

Tibetan Youth and Livelihoods

Nepal is not a signatory of the refugee convention and the recognized refugee categories have been based and distinguished on ethnicity and groups. The possession of the refugee cards have allowed them residence in Nepal but with restriction of employment .In the initial years of the settlements relief aid and food distribution was carried out and handicraft centers were opened to lead towards their self reliance. Now with the numbers of Tibetans who are educated are increasing it is difficult to assume that they would like to continue the same handicraft creation and production their parents have followed. Also the employment is restricted outside the offices that have been opened for the welfare of the Tibetans .Many Tibetans are being employed in those offices but the availability of such opportunities is limited .the other available option is the businesses and the enterprises that are owned and managed by the Tibetans. Many of the youth prefer to work in that environment that is culture friendly and also promoting their heritage. Besides that the Tibetans are running small restaurants that sell the Tibetan food which is well liked by community that lives here. Also they have very good trading skills, which lead them to open small shops that trade curio and antiques.

For the Tibetan/s, who have now become educated, they do have dreams of a having a career in different fields like banking, insurance, medical and other prospective careers educated Nepalese aspire for. But the limitation of the employment restricts the educated Tibetans from fulfillment of those dreams and they have to make compromises in life. The educated people then tend to go for jobs that do not require citizenship and

therefore get involved in working in small offices that are not suitable and does not correlate to their academic qualifications. Many Tibetan youth are working in Nepalese businesses and most of them are dissatisfied and they know that they will not be getting better opportunities.

As far as educational opportunities are concerned, they are allowed to attend the colleges but for the medical colleges there is a bar on the practicing licenses and examination in the absence of the citizenship. Most of the Tibetan youths have told me that because of the existing restrictions they do not study beyond the bachelors' degree and apply for jobs in offices or resort to taking up business opportunities.

The situation for Tibetans who have refugee cards are very difficult in terms of livelihoods but then for the future Tibetan youth who have been born in Nepal after the 1990s do not have refugee cards and are listed in the name of their parents. Once they become eighteen years and also educated, they do not have any document that they can account on. For them the basic documentation will not exist and then with more demands of life post education will be even more demanding.

Conclusion

In the national context many Nepalese, particularly youth are migrating to international countries in search for more employment opportunities. In a similar fashion, though Tibetan youth would like to explore employment opportunities outside the country and the difficulty of obtaining travel documents restricts their movement. Having survived the challenges of exile for the five decades in Nepal, the Tibetan youths despite much adversity will survive the challenges we hope with much resilience and live in peace and harmony.

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