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BHUTANESE REFUGEES LIVING IN EASTERN NEPAL : MAIN CAUSES

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Abstract:

There was great disturbance in Bhutan, known as a peaceful country located in the lap of Himalaya, in 1990. due to the administrative and rules step taken by the government in Bhutan, a kind of conflict was produced so that the Bhutanese of Nepalese origin stood on demonstration against the government steps as the government took oppressive measures and the Bhutanese of Nepalese origin came to take shelter in Nepal. After 1990, by the period of 3 years, about 85000 Bhutanese refugees entered in Nepal. This article is written in the periphery of the problems caused by Bhutanese refugees which is explained in brief.

BACKGROUND

Bhutan is a tiny, landlocked, multi-ethnic multi-cultural, multi lingual and multi religious Himalayan country, situated between China to the north and India to the east, south and west covering an area of 46,500 sq kilometers', extending from east to west 350 km. and north to south 150 km. roughly the size of Switzerland.

The country known as Druk-Yul (the land of the Thunder Dragon) or in Sanskrit Bhot-ant meaning that country's geographical situation at the end of the Bhot (Tibet) or sandal wood country, Whatever names exist, presently it is well known as "Bhutan" in the world.

The population of Bhutan was shown at 1 million according to census conducted in 1969 at first. Again it was estimated 1.4 million when she joined the U.N. in 1971 probably to gain more international aid but this figure was reduced to 600000 in 1988 as per her annual census record.

The ethnic composition of the population can be divided into three major groups but the " Land of the peaceful Dragon" does not have any ethnic group which could be considered the original inhabitant of the country as the Bhutanese are descendants of people who migrated from neighboring areas of Tibet, Burma, Sikkim, Nepal and India. Anyway, the most influential group is the "Ngalongs" who are the descendants of Tibetan immigrants living in west Bhutan (Ngalongs are ruling elite too) They brought Buddhism with them to the " Mountain Kingdom"

The second major inhabitants are "Shar chop" mainly residing in eastern Bhutan. Their origin can be traced to the tribes of north east India and North Burma. They entered into Bhutan during the 9th or 10th century.

The other section of the population are "Nepalese" who began to settle in the southern Bhutan according to the some historical source around first quarter of the seventeenth century. These sections of the people are dominant group among other and occupying around 45 percent of the total population. They live in Southern Bhutan and in Bhutanese language Dzongkha are called " Lhotshampas" (inhabitants of the South). The other minor communities are Doya, Tota, Brokpas etc.

Here is always a controversy in the matter relating to Nepalese people who settled in Bhutan. In this matter there is not a single answer. Some historians claim that Nepalese were first settler in Bhutan in

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1624 AD. When ShabdrungNawangNamgyal the first Unifier of Bhutan came to Gorkha during the time of king Ram Shah and requested him to send some familiesfor the security and prosperity to his country. Shabdrung again came in 1640 A.D. and carried some more Nepali families with him. On the other hand the Royal Government of Bhutan says that the history ofNepalese settlement in Bhutan could not be traced before first quarter of the 20th century due to the various reasons Nepali people came to this kingdom and Nepalese are only a hundred years old immigrants in Bhutan.

In reality, as stated like government version, it is completely a false statement. As a matter of Shabdrung's connection with the Gorkha kingdom, we have to wait for some time because historians are trying to explore those materials through their research works but in spite of failureof the documents, there is no doubt that Nepalese were inhabitant of the kingdom since very longtime. In this matter some research works have been done and have come to the conclusion about the realities of the Nepalese settlers in Bhutan. Among them one of the sources claimed that the Nepalese had already settled in the some parts of the country in 1833 A.D. the source state that in 1933 an Englishmen named Captain C.J Morris had visited southern Bhutanandhe found that Nepali had been there for 60 to 70 years earlier.

Another source says that "the dissidents from the refugee camps in Nepal claim all the refugees to be the Bhutanese subject and in fact they trace their presence in Bhutan as far back as 7th century, on the other hand the Government denounces such claims.

The history of Bhutan stated that the Indian prince Sindhuraj had ruled over Bhutan in the 7th century from Kamrupa, Assam.. If we consider it a reality then how can a Hindu ruler ruled over there without Hindus as the Nepalese origin people of Bhutan were almost 99% Hindus. The documents further sheds light that the ruling elite came to Bhutan after 1616 A.D. when ShabdrungNawangNamgyal came to Bhutan from Tibet.

The above mentioned sources clearly dismisses government's claims. However in this issue it still needs some more further research relating to the migrants of Nepalese people into Bhutan.

Politically, Bhutan is a monarchical country and the hereditary monarchy was established on 17 Dec 1907, King UgyenWangchuck was the first hereditary king(1907 - 26) followed by JigmeWangchuck (1926-52) JigmeDorjiWangchuck (1952-72) and JigmeSingyeWangchuckand Jigme Kesar Wangu chuckthe present ruler and the fifth monarch in line of Wangchuck dynasty.

CAUSES OF THE REFUGEES.

The causes of the flow of Bhutanese refugees in the decade of 1990's are undermentioned.

1) The new citizenship Act 1985 - the main cause of the Bhutanese political movementwas a new citizenship Act of 1985. It is an immediate cause too. In the matter of citizenship, government had change its policy from time to time and it made people once the citizen ofBhutan as non citizen later. Bhutan first attempt to define its citizenship came with the "Nationality Law of Bhutan" in 1958. According to this law people who fulfil the following conditions can become a citizen of the kingdom.

1.Any person can become a Bhutanese national:

a)If his/her father is a Bhutanese national and is a resident of the kingdom of Bhutan or ,
b)If any person is born within or outside Bhutan after the commencement of this law provided the father was a Bhutanese National at the time ofhis/her birth or,

2.Any foreigner who fulfils a petition to an official and takes an oath of loyalty according to the rules, he may be enrolled as a Bhutanese National provided that:

a)The person is a resident of the kingdom of Bhutan for More than 10 years and
b)Owns agriculture land within the kingdom

3.If a women, married to a Bhutanese National, Submits a petition and takes the oath of loyalty may be enrolled as a Bhutanese National.

4.If any foreigner submits a petition and has served government service satisfactorily at least five years and has been residing in the kingdom of Bhutan for at least 10 years, he may receive a Bhutanese Nationality certificate

According to the above law many Nepali origin southern Bhutanese received the citizenshipand became Bhutanese nationals. But the nationality law of 1958 was updated in 1977 and againin 1985 A.D.

Now the citizenship act of 1985 categorized Bhutanese national into three classes.

- 5.Citizenship by birth
- 6.By registration and
- 7.Bynaturalization

A person whose parents are both citizens of Bhutan is a citizen of Bhutan by birth.

A person Permanently domiciled in Bhutan on or before 31 December 1958 and whose name is registered in the census register maintained by the ministry of home affairs is a citizen of Bhutan by registration.

Eligibility for naturalization requires residence for 15 years for government employees and those with one citizen parents and 20 years for others. Naturalization also requires a number of criteria that could not be met by most Nepali Bhutanese such as fluency and literacy in the National language Dzongkha therefore the new citizenship act of 1985 which was brought by the Royal Government superseding the covetedly enacted code of laws of 1958 and 1977 respectively, had great potentiality for creating statelessness to Southern Bhutanese

2) 1988Census- It can to be observed as an immediate cause. While demanding the withdrawal of those controversial citizenship act of 1985. The government on the other hand in 1988 a census began to "Purify Bhutanese nationals" in the Southern Bhutan only. This was the deliberatemove of the government to deprive the citizenship right of as many southern Nepali origin Bhutanese as possible who were required to produce the evidence ofresidence and the certificate of origin, the arbitrary cut-off year 1958, by producing land tax receipts of 1958 based on this criteria,the government categorized the southern Bhutanese into following seven categories.

- F 1 - Genuine Bhutanese
- F2 - Returned migrants (Those who had left Bhutan but returned).
- F3 - Drop-outs (Those not available during the time of census
- F4 - A non national women married to Bhutanese man.
- F5 - A non national men married to Bhutanese women
- F6 - Adoption cases (Children legally adopted)
- F7 - Non national (Migrants and illegal settlers)

As a result, except the people belonging to the category F1 (Those people who could produce 1958 receipts and certificate of origin) remaining were targeted for eviction. Surprisingly, the census team put members of the same family in different categories. For example, father in F 1 and mother and children in F4

3)DriglamNamza (Code of conduct)

DriglamNarnza was a ancient code of social etiquette of the Ngalong elite. DriglamNamiza includes both outward behavior such as dress and forms of greeting and inner attitude such as respect for one's elder and all other. It includes the following values.

- a.Respect for Authority and a hierarchy that promotes the interest of the society and the nation.
- b.Respect for elders.
- c.Respect for each other as member of society and fellow citizens.
- d.A sense ofdiscipline etc.

This rule now introduced by the Bhutanese authorities from 1 May,1989. According to the rule, all people of southern Bhutan were directed to wear "Gho" and "Kira" dress. (For ladies and gents wearing national dress) Whenever any Bhutanese found without national dress was fined upto Rs. 150 for the time and increases simultaneously and any breach of law was followed even by imprisonment. Any Citizen in particular the Lhotshampas, had to wear the national dress at market place, offices, schools and at public places.

The materials as well as the dress is unusual, uncomfortable for any workers, heavy and thick cloth was unsuitable in the hot region especially Southern Bhutan that experience almost sub-tropical climate during summer season. The royal elite failed to understand the climatic condition but made wearing "Gho" and " Kira" compulsory. So it was protested by the Southern Bhutanese people.

4) One nation one people policy

Bhutan is a multi ethnic, multi-lingual and multi cultural country. Nearabout there are 14 different kinds of languages spoken ethnicity people live here but there is harmony and tolerance among them. In real sense, there is unity in the diversity.

But in the year 1989, the Royal government of Bhutan implemented yet another policy" One nation one People" Policy in the land of cultural diversity. The cultural and religious presentation reached its climax under this policy. With its implementation, cultural pluralism in the kingdom was almost banned and the language dress and cultural of the ruling elite was made compulsory and imposed on all Bhutanese people, disobeying the customs was punishable act either by fines or imprisonment or even both.

Now with the same attitude the Nepali language been banned from the schools. In spite of Dzongkha as official language, Nepali and English languages used as the medium of instruction in the school, National Assembly and more often in the ministry and departments. Dzongkha and Nepali were both used alternatively i.e. Dzongkha in northern and Nepali in Southern Bhutan. Most of the documents till 1988 had been published and circulated in Nepali apart from Dzongkha and English but after 1988, Nepali language and curriculum in schools was banned. Thus, the government made gross violation to human rights by violating the right to culture and education in response, the Bhutan government made a bonfire to Nepali books in schools.

5) Green Belt Policy

Mean while, Bhutanese government had tried to implement another project for the displacement of Southern Bhutanese from the Southern Bhutan. That was "Green Belt Policy." Originally it was proposed in 1984 and was approved by the National Assembly in 1990. Green belt was supposed to be a 2 kilometers swath that would run along the southern Indo-Bhutan border. Its motivation according to a government report in 1990, was to check erosion and thereby flooding in India and provide a distinct physical border between Bhutan and India. The government was expecting to implement either offering compensation or resettlement. In fact the project was a branch of Bhutanization programme. Therefore, people protested to this programme and the government also could not implement it due to widespread opposition as well as the donor agency Asian Development Bank did not pay their keen interest. According to a source had it been existing, 20 to 30% of the Nepali population would have been dislocated with the creation of Green Belt demarcation.

The Protest Begin

In April 1988, two members of the Royal Advisory Council Dasho T.N. Rizal and Dasho B.P. Bhandari submitted a joint petition to the king" concerning the 1988 census and its working pattern which had classified people into 7 categories which created general discontentment in the country and in reality added fuel to the existing problems. But instead of hearing petition Rizal was ousted from his post and imprisoned for three days. After his release he came to Nepal and founded forum (PFHRB) People's Forum for Human Rights in Bhutan) but in 1989 Rizal was abducted from Birtamode by the government of Bhutan with the assistance of Nepal government.

Another political organization was set up in exile in Indian soil in June 1990 called "Bhutan People's Party" (BPP) after the formation of PFHRB. Meanwhile, some serious unrest began spreading across Southern Bhutan. BPP organized mass public demonstrations in Southern Bhutan in mid September and October, 1990. In response, the government mobilized army and police in Southern Bhutan and the army and police began to commit atrocities and arrested anyone found suspecting anti-nationals, terrorist, imprisoned, tortured and terrified the innocent people beyond estimation. The dragon land in real sense turned to the Reign of Terror committing the blunders, plunders, loot rapes, atrocities and inhuman practices to the Southern Bhutanese. The mobilization of troops and the atrocities committed by the army and police resulted in the flow of genuine Bhutanese citizens as refugees to take shelter in Nepal via through the route of India and are living in the refugees camps in Jhapa and Morang districts in Nepal. The UNHCR and her sister alliance are helping and caring the refugees on the basis of humanitarian aid.

In this way the problems of Bhutanese refugees have reminded same today since 1990, for a period of 19 Years. Within this period, the refugees have crossed many ups and down. Instead of making long lasting revolution of the problems, the refugees have been taken to the third countries for re-settlement. (to Europe and America). This seems to be temporary solution of the problems but this is not a good step because the refugees have not keep their peace on their land. This situation has created such type of possibility that Bhutanese government may be more encouraged and do more oppressive activities on the

Bhutanese of Nepalese origin .

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