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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE AND UNCERTAINTY: SOME PERCEPTIONS OF TIBETAN DIASPORA IN DELHI

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#### Abstract

The present study argues that there is a need to explore people's perceptions of non-violent struggle and their life experience with non-violent struggle which can enrich the debate of the contemporary relevance of non-violent struggle. To explore this, the Tibetan diaspora from Delhi is taken as a case for this purpose, who have adopted non-violent struggle for more than six decades as of now. In-depth interviews were carried out in a Tibetan settlement at MajnuKaTilla in Delhi. Twenty-five respondents were interviewed using purposive sampling. Their views are mostly pessimistic about the non-violent approach, given its high rate of unsuccessfulness and its negligible impact on China. The lackadaisical approach of international peace keeping organisations towards their non-violent approach is also responsible for it. These reasons are compelling some of them to think of violence as an alternative tool to achieve the desired end. To address these radical tendencies, efforts like educating Tibetans about M K Ghandi, Martin Luther king Jr. and Nelson Mandela's contribution and the systematic utilization of non-violent strategies in an innovative way to achieve the goal might help. The study concludes with the fact that International peace keeping organisations especially United Nations can make a significant contribution in internationalising the Tibetan issue and provide peaceful solution.

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#### Introduction:-

A nonviolent struggle is a form of resistance that adopts 'nonviolent protests, non-cooperation and intervention' 'to build power and achieve political goals' (Sharp, 2005; Chenoweth 2020) or utilizes political tools instead of military weaponry (Miller, 2006). This form of struggle has been adopted by various groups of people worldwide, which has attracted media, researchers, and practitioners. As a result, various centres and institutions have emerged to support and work on nonviolent strategic conflicts, such as the International Centre on Nonviolent Conflict, Albert Einstein Institution, etc. Furthermore, Independent Researchers have also worked extensively, which has boosted the trend of nonviolent struggle. The works of Gene Sharp 'The Politics of Nonviolent Action and waging nonviolent struggle' and the empirical study of Stephan and Chenoweth's 'Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict' have contributed to increasing the trend of nonviolent struggle. Stephan's study highlights that 53 per cent of non-violent struggles achieved success compared to violent resistance, which stood at 26 per cent. They mentioned two main reasons for the success of non-violent struggle; firstly, it enhances local and international legitimacy and mass participation in the resistance. Secondly, using force against non-violent movement is likely to

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backfire against the government. However, the recent trend shows that the influence and success of nonviolent resistance are declining. Chenoweth (2020) in his recent study, argued that nonviolent resistance campaigns were reached new heights over the past decade; however, their effectiveness had begun to decline even before the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. The same study argues that the changes in the structure and capabilities of these nonviolent movements are the significant causes of its decline. Leaving aside the reasons of success or failure of a non-violent struggle, the current research phase is less focused on successful cases (Nepstad, 2015). The present study argues that there is a need to explore people's perceptions of non-violent struggle and their life experience with non-violent struggle which can enrich the debate of the contemporary relevance of non-violent struggle. To explore this, Tibetan diaspora from Delhi is taken as a case for this purpose, who have adopted non-violent struggle for more than six decades as of now.

### **Tibetans, Dalai Lama and their Struggle**

The Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950 and the subsequent perpetuation of human rights violations by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) led to a revolt in Lhasa, Tibet's administrative Capital, in 1959. This caused Dalai Lama of Tibet (Religious and Political head) along with eighty thousand Tibetans flee to India, Nepal, and Bhutan. Later, some Tibetans moved to some western countries, while the Dalai Lama and most Tibetans settled in India. They have also established a Government-in-Exile in India at Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh. However, no country recognised it as a valid Government except Tibetans living outside. While living in exile, they struggled to free Tibet from Chinese occupation, using nonviolent approach primarily. However, during these six decades, they used some violent approaches in the early years and self-immolations in later stages but all in vain against the mighty power of China. (Terrone, 2018). This resulted in the change of leadership's stand on Tibet from complete independence to Autonomy within China. Also, their leadership entirely changed their struggle to a nonviolent approach. However, there is a section among Tibetan Diaspora who have not yet yielded their struggle of complete independence of Tibet from China. This section is known as radical wing of Tibetan diaspora colloquially called Tibetan Youth Congress among certain sections. Topgyal (2013) maintains that TYC has become a forum for Tibetan youth to exchange ideas, raise voices about Tibetan issues and symbolises Tibetan people's struggle to attain independence.

Talking about non-violence and Tibetan people, Dorjee (2015) writes, that many people believe nonviolence to be synonymous with Tibet. However, the fact is that the nonviolent struggle is a relatively new phenomenon in the Tibetan culture. Since Dalai Lama is the spiritual and political head of Tibetans and a preacher of non-violence, he enjoys a considerable influence over Tibetan culture. Therefore, due to his influence, nonviolence has become a chief attribute of Tibetan identity. Dalai Lama's nonviolent approach has been largely influenced by Gandhian nonviolent approach and Gene Sharp's pragmatic approach, which stated that nonviolence is more effective than violence (Nepstad, 2015). However, the fact is that a nonviolent approach gains currency among the masses only if it seems to bear fruits in the foreseeable future. As some Tibetans who are living in exile have raised their eyebrows over this longstanding infructuous nonviolent struggle. The focus of this study revolves around the discussion of two themes among the Tibetan people in exile; the perception of people towards the non-violent approach and the issue of independence or autonomy for their homeland. To explore these questions, in-depth interviews were carried out in a Tibetan settlement at MajnuKaTilla in Delhi. Twenty-five respondents were interviewed using purposive sampling. The participants selected through the purposive sampling were; more than 25 years old, Tibetans who are not citizens of India, currently residing in Delhi, and volunteered themselves for the research. These criteria proved to be useful in the collection of rich information from them to understand the issues at hand. In order to abide by the research ethics, anonymous names were ascribed to the participants.

### **Nonviolent Struggle and the Tibetan Perception**

There is a famous saying that nonviolence looks fine as long as it works. Tibetan people mostly believe that nonviolent struggle cannot be the ultimate solution to free Tibet, and there is no possibility of getting freedom by the existing way of struggle. As one of the respondents, Tsin said, 'Since our exile from Tibet, we mostly adopted a non-violent approach, but now I think it cannot be the ultimate means to liberate our homeland. Nonviolent struggle does not always succeed at the end.' This dilemma regarding non-violent struggle is due to its ineffectiveness. Morally, Gandhi's way of Struggle is attractive, but in the Tibetan struggle, at least in the future, it is not easy to imagine that it will succeed politically (Anand, 2000). Tibetans believe that they have not achieved anything till date and the issue is disappearing from the spotlight gradually. The China's disinterestedness and apathy towards the Tibetan nonviolent struggle, further heightened the disinterestedness among the Tibetan people. One of the respondents revealed, 'Nonviolence is one of the best solutions to any conflict, if the opponent believes in it. In our struggle, the

Chinese administration uses violence against our people. Our elders said, thousands of our fellow beings have been imprisoned and hundreds killed. I believe, changing any political system may not be possible only through the nonviolent means(Zhao)'. Hence, at times peculiar circumstances like the stubbornness of an opponent and worn out methods push humans to violence. Furthermore, during the recent scuffle between India and China on the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the president of Tibetan Youth Congress, Dhoalkar, expressed his views. When he was asked about the Tibetan issue, he said, 'We want Tibetan Independence through nonviolence, through dialogues, and trying very hard to avoid bloodshed as much as possible, though, without fighting, it can't be possible at the present situation'. (Banerjee, 2020). Apart from the apathy with the extant non-violent approach, Tibetans are thinking of exploring newer options also. Tibetans believe that, of late, violence has become a dominant force in the contemporary world, and guerrilla warfare can be one of the options. As one of the respondents said, 'we are living in the world of violence, where non-violent struggle looks less relevant. Therefore, to move forward in such a situation, at least there should be some reform in our strategy towards Tibet. Guerrilla warfare and Support from other countries can be a game changer(Xizi)'. Since nonviolence bore no fruits, Tibetans are tilting towards violent approach. Additionally, the main reason for the shift towards violent struggles among Tibetans specifically and in the contemporary world in general is the failure of peace-keeping international organisations such as United Nations. The recent example such as Ethiopia-Tigray conflict, Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenian, is also the failure of the United Nations. As one of the respondents said, 'These peacekeeping bodies are on paper only, nobody cares for us' (Tsenpo). The same view is corroborated by Homolar and Rodrigues as 'What happened within national boundaries remains outside the scope of international legal frameworks, despite their responsibility to protect the principle of sovereignty within international law' (2019). So, it becomes amply clear that the involvement of peace keeping organisations in the Tibetan issue specifically have a considerable role to resolve it peacefully. Also, views of certain respondents give a sense of disappointment of the people of conflict areas from these institutions which pushes them to other extreme options. So, International organisations need to play a role in resolving the Tibetan issue so that people are discouraged to think of extreme steps. To curtail this newer tendency of thinking of violent strategies among Tibetans, they need to be taught the values of nonviolence in their own language, which they lack. This lack of knowledge regarding nonviolent struggle stories naturally minimized the spectrum of options available or imaginable to them. It can be overcome through spreading information about non-violent strategies among their leadership and the organisations' working for Tibetan freedom.

### **Question of Independence or Autonomy**

After fighting for independence of Tibet for a long time, the Tibetan leadership came to realise that it is not possible now to get complete independence of Tibet, which led to softening of their stand which is quite visible in the following statements from the Dalai Lama. In 1962, he declared that the Tibetan people had reasserted their independence after enduring nine years of foreign domination, lauding their resolve to fight till independence is regained from the invader. However, on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2007 and other occasions, the same Dalai Lama sought autonomy for all Tibetans to achieve equality and unity between the Chinese and the Tibetans, thereby fostering the country's [China's] stability. (Topygal, 2013). This softening of stand is also supported by some Tibetans. As one of the respondents revealed, 'There is no possibility of complete independence of Tibet, given china's heavy political and economic clout. Since we have lost hundreds of our fellow beings in the same cause, we should at least get autonomy of our homeland, so that our sacrifices don't go in vain(Xipin)'. However, mostly it is contradicted with what majority of Tibetans believe. As one of the respondents stated, 'We still believe in Tibet's complete liberation from Chinese authority, even though our leadership moderated from independence to Tibet's autonomy' (Tanzin). They believe that our homeland was independent before the Chinese invasion, therefore we will always fight for independent Tibet. As one respondent stated, 'before the invasion of China, Tibet was an independent state, and it is our right to have independent state rather than autonomy within China' (Songtsen). The autonomy does not guarantee the security of the Tibetan identity which they are anxious about as Khai stated that 'we have sacrificed a lot and hundreds of Tibetans have been killed since the Chinese invasion. In Autonomy, our identity will be still in jeopardy'. Even if autonomy is achieved, there can be uncertainty and hostile shifts in the policies of china in future (Topygal 2013). This fear of identity among Tibetans is genuine, because what is happening in the Xinjiang region of China where identity of Uyghur Muslims is being systematically targeted and erased by the Chinese authority. The autonomy of Tibet is also opposed by the Tibetan Youth congress, which is struggling for independence of Tibet. It is partly because TYC enjoyed tremendous support from different groups of Tibetan people, such as Friends of Tibet India (FTI) and Students of a Free Tibet (SFT) (Topygal, 2013). FTI and SFT are the Tibetan associations working for the liberation of Tibet and development for exiled Tibetans.

**Conclusion:-**

The present study though micro in nature, was designed to explore the views and experiences of Tibetans about the non-violent struggle. Their views are mostly pessimistic about the non-violent approach, given its high rate of unsuccessfulness and its negligible impact on China. The lackadaisical approach of international peace keeping organisations towards their non-violent approach is also responsible for it. These reasons are compelling them to think of violence as an alternative tool to achieve the desired end. To address these radical tendencies, efforts like educating Tibetans about M K Ghandi, Martin Luther king Jr. and Nelson Mandela's contribution and the systematic utilization of non-violent strategies in an innovative way to achieve the goal might help. The study also highlights that there is contradiction about independence and autonomy of Tibet between the Tibetan leadership and the common masses who are fighting for independent Tibet. This emerging contradiction about the Tibet's liberation and the methods utilized is weakening the unity among the Tibetan people in exile. The study highlights that there is a need to build a strong coordination between Tibetan organisations, common masses and Government-in-Exile to bring them on the same platform to present a united stand for their goal. The study concludes with the fact that International peace keeping organisations especially United Nations can make a significant contribution in internationalising the Tibetan issue and provide peaceful solution.

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