

Many in America will remember the gruesome way that some pseudo-religious cult demonstrated their bizarre notions and beliefs by attempting mass suicides in the 90's.

The 39 followers of Heaven's Gate committed mass suicide in order to reach an alien spacecraft. Back in late the 70's, another dangerous cult consumed the lives of more than 900 Americans at 'Jonestown' in a frantic bid to keep its lid on mental and physical abuses that has occurred at the hand of its leader Jim Jones. These groups thrived on deceit, coercion, blackmail, physical and mental abuses on its members. They are also notoriously adept at discrediting its whistleblowers.

Today we see similar signs beginning to unfold in the 'Shugden' group that proclaims as the only pure Buddhist lineage now led by a disgruntled Tibetan monk named Kelsang Gyatso. The same monk who have ordered the anti-Dalai Lama protests according to former members of the group. In late 70's, The Dalai Lama deemed the Shugden to be a highly sectarian and disservice to Buddha dharma. Shugden leader named Zemey Rinpoche had published a book in 1973 where he threatened its members of 'wrathful punishment' if they were to study and engage with other Buddhist lineages. Since then, a number of former Shugden members have gradually come forth to testify on abuses that they had experienced in Shugden centers, notably the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT). These centers have successfully evaded media scrutiny on these abuses by launching peremptory verbal attack against the Dalai Lama as a cover up.

Soon the American public will see NKT's front group International Shugden Community (ISC) members traveling cross continent from Australia to England to here in US following the Dalai Lama. They accuse the Dalai Lama of "banning" Shugden and "persecution" of its followers in India. However, the Dalai Lama is a refugee devoid of state mechanism to effect such 'ban'. Unbelievable as it may sound, they often chant slurs and slogans like "False Dalai Lama, Stop Lying!" that begs the question, who is the ultimate beneficiary?

On 23 June, a new video has surfaced on internet in which a former senior member of Shugden gives details of its links with Chinese government agents. This explains the easy access to fund to organize protests against the Dalai Lama across different continents.

China invaded Tibet in 1949 and occupied it since then. The Dalai Lama has sought genuine autonomy for Tibet. Some experts believe that China is waiting for the Dalai Lama to pass away and hope Tibet issue to die with him. While governments and leaders have lauded his approach, meanwhile China have used every means to discredit the Dalai Lama by

openly calling him 'devil in sheep's clothing'. Such actions are identical to those of Shugden and sheds light on a more potent threat against the Dalai Lama, a marriage of convenience between the Chinese government and the Shugden.

Lets look at factors that makes up a cult and seven characteristics of NKT Shugden group that strongly mirror those of a cult and perhaps the reason why Tibetans generally resist it.

1) Absolute faith on its leader. Kelsang Gyatso, the leader of the Shugden NKT group systematically bans his followers from reading materials written by other teachers (and other kinds of books for that matter) and forbids members from receiving teachings from other Buddhist teachers. A letter sent by NKT center to its branches reveal how this is implemented.

2) Supremacists ideology. The Shugden group claims that their understanding of the Dharma is the purest in Tibetan Buddhism. Other teachings from the different sects of Tibetan Buddhism, Sakya, Nyingma, Kagyu, and Jhonang are not accepted as part of their "pure Dharma teachings". A written work by a Shugden leader Zemey Rinpoche titled 'the Yellow Book' published in 1973 details a list of 'wrathful punishment' for anyone who practices the teachings of other lineages.

3) Financial exploitation of its members. The Followers are financially exploited as the former members/survivors of the NKT testified that they were even asked to take loans and sell their properties to fund the center.

4) Blackmails and intimidations of its members. Ex-members of NKT has endlessly shared stories where they were threatened with legal and spiritual backlash if they spoke out against the NKT. Followers were often told that they will "burn in hell" if they harbor slightest of doubt regarding the NKT or its leader.

5) Portraying as a victim. The NKT often places itself as a victim of "discrimination" and "religious oppression" mainly by the Dalai Lama. The members of the NKT are still drowning in the mindset of a being a "victim" of oppression from a stateless religious leader who tirelessly bears the responsibility for the survival of Tibetan culture and six million Tibetans.

6) Isolation. The NKT members are coerced into mental isolation and even being barred from meeting family members in some cases.

7) Promise of "eternal bliss." Kelsang Gyatso, the leader of NKT Shugden in his commentary to Heart Jewel, stated that by putting their

trust in Shugden, the followers will naturally become pure, have a powerful ally and always make the right decisions.

These dreadful signs of decay are threats to a healthy society, especially to a much smaller Tibetan Buddhist community. The Dalai Lama since early days has cautioned about this and in response, Shugden group did what a cult does best, they levelled baseless allegations against him in an attempt to discredit him. While Tibetans inside Tibet are calling in support of the Dalai Lama at the risk of their lives under China, the NKT Shugden group is never seen protesting against the Chinese government's repression in Tibet.

Today, the Dalai Lama is a towering spiritual figure and popularly acclaimed as a global champion of peace and compassion. He is greatly loved in the free world and is coming to California to celebrate his 80th birthday with his American friends after appearing at Glastonbury Festival in UK.

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