

On the Footsteps of the Precious Ocean of Pure Melody

August 1996

*The cuckoo bird from the land of Mon brings rain,
It descends from the sky
It brings blessings to the earth.
Life grows and blossoms.
When the cuckoo bird comes from Moon'
My lover and I join as one
In body, heart and mind.*

It may seem incredible, but this song was written by a Dalai Lama. Tsangyang Gyaltso (the Precious Ocean of Pure Melody), the Sixth Dalai Lama. He took birth in Monyul, the land of Monⁱ in 1643.

The Dalai Lama lived his first years in a small hamlet called Ugyeling. Near the temple of Ugyeling there is a tall and magnificent tree. Many legends revolve around this tree (a sandal tree?): it seems that this tree was planted by the Sixth Dalai Lama before being taken away to his destiny in Lhasa. He made a prophesy saying that when the 3 main branches would become equal he would come back to Tawang. The local priest said that the 3 branches reached the same size in 1959, a few months before the Dalai Lama, fleeing Tibet after the Chinese invasion, passed through Tawang and 'visited again' Ugyeling.

When the delegation reached Ugyeling, the Regent Desi Sangyay Gyaltso had still not revealed that the Lama-King was no more fearing that intrigues would start as soon as the news of his passing away would be known. He was also very keen to finish the task assigned to him by the Fifth Dalai Lama: to complete the Potala Palace in Lhasa. But a series of divination and special

pujas had given the Regent the certitude that the reincarnation of the Fifth Dalai Lama was born in South of Tibet, in Monyul.

The care-taker told us that when he was very young, Tsewang Lhamo, the mother of the future Dalai Lama once asked her son to get a piece of wood and fix it in the soil to tie a cow. Instead of planting the stick in the soil, the young Tsangyang made a hole with his finger in the stone and stuck the stick inside it. It is one of the many miracles he is said to have performed. The stone was still on the altar.

Tsangyang Gyaltso was in many ways an exceptional Dalai Lama. At the age of six, he was taken away to Tsona, the main monastery on the other side of the border, where he was kept for 8 years under the tight surveillance of the local Governors (the Regent Sangye Gyaltso had not yet revealed to anybody his real identity). He was already an adolescent he finally left for Nagartse near Lhasa where his Guru, the Second Panchen Lama enthroned him as the Sixth Dalai Lama.

He consistently refused to take the monk vows from his Guru and preferred the pleasure of life, visiting at night the taverns in the village of Shol below his Potala Palace and writing love songs to his beloved girl friend:

*In my Palace, the place of Heaven on Earth
they call me Rigzin Tsangyang Gyaltso
But below , in the village of Shol
they call me Dangzang Wangpo, the profligate,
for my lovers are many.*

His exquisite poetry is known today by all Tibetans and Monpas and is still sang during long evenings around a fire after a few cups of chang.

Academicians will fight to decide if he was a great Tantric master or only an ordinary man, if his poetry contains an esoteric teaching written in a secret language or are only the verses of a libertine. He may have been both at the same time, maybe he had come a couple of centuries too early. He loved freedom and could not bear the prison that seems to have been life in the Potala, he was suffocating in the darks rooms housing thousands of gods and wrathful demons. He preferred the company of his friends. How could he have

not felt oppressed in the midst of power struggles and intrigues between aristocrats in Tibetan government in Lhasa, the Mongol chieftains and the Emperor of China? Was he remembering the days when he was a kid in Urygeling and used to escape to roam around the barley fields and the rhododendron bushes?

But his legend continued after his presumed death. The "Secret Biography" of his "hidden life" tell us that he escaped the Mongols who had deposed him, wanted to kill him and he secretly left for Eastern Tibet and Inner Mongolia where he first became a wandering monk and then settled in Alashan which is today in Inner Mongolia. He passed away in 1746 , forty years after his official death. He built a large number of monasteries and had thousand of disciples. Only a very few knew who he really was.

His last poem before his presumed death is known by all. It announced his return as the Seventh Dalai Lama.

Oh White Crane!

Lend me your wings

I shall not fly far

From Lithang, I shall return

Two years later a young boy Kalsang Gyaltso was born in Lithang (Eastern Tibet) who would soon be recognised as the VIIth Dalai Lama. "Lama Geno" could have said Tsangyang and the story goes on.

The Thirteenth Dalai Lama once told Sir Charles Bell, the British Political Officer in Lhasa: "He (the Sixth) did not observe even the rules of a fully ordained monk. he drank wine habitually. And he used to have his body in several place at the same time, e.g. in Lhasa, in Kongpo (a province seven day's journey east of Lhasa), and elsewhere. Even the place whence he retired to the Honourable Field (i.e. died) is uncertain; one tomb of his is in Alashan in Mongolian where there is another in Drepung monastery. One if his bodies used to appear in the crowd in the Reception Hall of the Seventh Dalai Lama. One is said to appear also at my receptions, But I am unable to say whether this is true or not".

Tsangyang Gyalsto has always been the darling of the Tibetan people. For them though remaining a god, his compassion was so great that he condescended to have feelings like a human beings, he even acted like a human being, while still remaining Avalokiteshvara incarnated, the bodhisatva of compassion, the Precious Protector of the Land of Snow. Three beautiful images always come to my mind while thinking of Tsagyang Gyaltsa, the first of a boy escaping from Ugyenling and running in the green fields of Monyul, the second of an adolescent tall and handsome (like the Monpas can be) holding a bow in one hand, wearing a sky blue satin robe and a golden hearing; he was passing in front of some high Tibetan dignitaries and blessing them in a hurry with a hand full of rings and the final image of a man at the end of his life, dancing and leaving his footsteps in the snow while trying to show to a group of close disciples the complicated steps of the most esoteric religious dance.

These are three images of a same person who was so many persons at the same time, a fascinating and disconcerting man who was sometimes more than a man and did not want to be a god. A man loved by his people though so many times misunderstood and who loved freedom above all.

ⁱ Today known as Tawang District of Arunachal Pradesh, the North-eastern state of India.