

“Large insects are eating and secretly injuring small insects”, wrote the 13th Dalai Lama to the British Trade Agent in Tibet in 1910. He was on his way to exile in India, chased by Chinese invading troops.

History has a tendency to repeat itself: “large insects” continue to devour “smaller ones”.

Though the 13th Dalai Lama returned to the Land of Snows and publicly declared Tibet’s independence in 1912, his successor had to follow the same road to exile in 1959. Once again, the small insects were gulped down, this time in the name of a “People’s” ideology. To add injury to the agony, Mao declared that his troops were ‘liberating’ the Roof of the World.

What a strange fate for this young toddler Lhamo Dhondrub, born 70 years ago in a small village of Amdo province (northeastern Tibet). One day in 1937, a delegation of monks entered the village and knocked at his parents’ door. He immediately recognised one of the servants: “Sera Lama”. The man, in disguise, was the abbot of Sera, one of the large Tibetan monasteries near the Tibetan capital, three months away by caravan. A few weeks later, the boy was officially recognised as the reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama and at the age of 4, he was enthroned as the head of the Tibetan State. For the Tibetans, the living incarnation of Avalokitesvara, the Buddha of Compassion was back.

In today's world, role models for the youth (or even the less young) are a rarity. This year, two great human beings who could fulfill such a role, respectively celebrate their 60th and 70th birthdays with less than a month's interval. Apart from being examples worth emulating, the Dalai Lama and Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese leader who has spent most of the past 16 years in jail or house arrest, have many things in common.

For one, the exiled Tibetan leader and the daughter of Gen. Aung San, the hero of Burma's independence struggle love 'freedom', but their people have not known the meaning of this word for a long time. In an often immoral world, both incarnate rare and high values.

It is again not a coincidence that the biographies of both carry the magic word. The Dalai Lama has authored *Freedom in Exile* in which he recalls his youth, the invasion of Tibet and finally his flight to India where he still lives as a refugee. Suu Kyi could unfortunately not write her autobiography as she was in confinement behind the walls of her Rangoon's residence, but her late husband, Dr. Michael Aris has collected her early writings in a book titled, *Freedom from Fear*.

Another connection between the two Buddhist leaders is the subject of Dr Aris's research: for two years he worked on "A Study of Buddhist Hagiography" at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies in Simla. The main theme of his study was the life and times of Tsangyang Gyaltso, the 6th Dalai Lama. During this time Suu Kyi studied "The Growth and Development of Burmese and Indian Intellectual Traditions under Colonialism."

Intellectually, philosophically and emotionally, India has played a great role in the lives of these two lovers of Freedom. When he refers to India, the Dalai Lama often speaks of "Arya Bhumi" (the "Pure Land"). He has criss-crossed the country since the spring of 1959 when he left

his palace in Lhasa to take refuge in India (he shifted to Himachal Pradesh in the early 60's). Aung San Suu Kyi also travelled extensively through the Himalayas when her husband was posted in Simla. Both leaders have written and spoken of India's age-old traditions of peace and tolerance and the importance of non-violence in today's world.

Both have always put the service to their people above their personal lives and realizations. When she married Michael, Suu Kyi asked him for a "favour", "I only ask one thing, that, should my people need me, you would help me to do my duty by them." Fate caught up with her in March 1988 when she became the leader of the democracy movement in Burma (now called Myanmar). It probably explains why the Dalai Lama likes to call her "my little sister".

A sadder aspect is that though both have a great respect for India, the political leaders of this country have rarely shown sympathy for their political cause despite the great principles that India's leaders swear on. On October 10, 1989, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Dalai Lama. The citation says: "His struggle for the liberation of Tibet consistently has opposed the use of violence. He has instead advocated peaceful solutions based upon tolerance and mutual respect in order to preserve the historical and cultural heritage of his people."

It was just 5 months after the tanks rolled on Tiananmen Square and 4 months after Suu Kui was arrested for the first time. Two years later, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize: "In the good fight for peace and reconciliation, we are dependent on persons who set examples, persons who can symbolize what we are seeking and mobilize the best in us. Aung San Suu Kyi is just such a person. She unites deep commitment and tenacity with a vision in which the end and the means form a single unit."

Travelling in Norway, the Dalai Lama recently told the press that he

was always praying for the quick release of Burma's democracy leader. When asked to comment on the Generals of Burma's military junta, he heartily laughed and retorted that as Buddhists, the Generals should follow the teachings of Lord Buddha in their political activities. Unfortunately, in his case as in that of his Burmese sister, a Big Brother is watching in Beijing. How can a regime which smashes its own youth with tanks, ever support a 'genuine autonomy' for Tibet or a true democracy for Burma? Burma's tragedy is that the Generals continue to follow Beijing's dictums instead of Buddha's teachings.

The Dalai Lama and Suu Kyi face the same problem: a totalitarian regime which refuses to let go its grip over people's lives and destiny. A regime which hates freedom! And they stand for Freedom!

Though his political struggle has led him nowhere so far, the Dalai Lama's philosophy is spreading the world over: "No matter what part of the world we come from, we are all basically the same human beings. We all seek happiness and try to avoid suffering. We have the same basic human needs and concerns. All of us human beings want freedom and the right to determine our own destiny as individuals and as peoples. That is human nature. The great changes that are taking place everywhere in the world are a clear indication of this."

But is Inner freedom enough?

People and nations need also to be outwardly free. The Dalai Lama believes that on this path one learns more from one's so-called enemy than from a friend. But the way is long and arduous, full of hurdles. That why the Tibetan leader likes to quote the Buddhist sage Shantideva:

If it can be remedied/ There is no need to be unhappy./ If it can't be remedied/ What is the use to be unhappy?/ Can we hope that small insects will not be devoured/ forever by big ones?

Then the ordeals of the Dalai Lama and Aung San Suu Kyi would have not been in vain.