



Two Fates

Two Struggles for Freedom

2005

In today's world, role models for the youth (or even the less young) are a rarity. Perhaps it is not a coincidence but two great human beings who could be assigned such roles, are respectively celebrating their 60th and 70th birthdays with less than a month's interval.

Apart from being examples worth emulating, Tenzin Gyaltso, the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet who had to flee his country 46 years ago 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 worshipping a new God called 'Money', both incarnate this rare value of freedom of the spirit and are thereby an inspiration for youth all over the world.

It is again not a coincidence that both are Nobel Peace Prize Laureates and the biographies of both carry the magic word. The Dalai Lama has authored "*Freedom in Exile*" in which he recalls how he was discovered as the incarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama, his youth, the invasion of his country and finally his flight to India where he 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 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. At the same 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 traveled extensively through the Himalayas when her husband was posted in Simla (again Himachal). 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.

Traveling 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's, 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. Perhaps as Buddhists, the Dalai Lama and Aung San Suu Kyi are able to see a deeper root cause behind their people's current *dukh*, but any ordinary human being can see that they both face the same enemy, whether it is in Rangoon or Lhasa: a totalitarian regime which refuses to let go its grip over people's lives and destiny. A regime which hates Freedom.

One of my most powerful souvenirs, is of a visit to Berkhar, a remote village in Arunachal Pradesh. The place is so inaccessible that only two 'foreigners' had visited it before me. This is the birth place of Tsangyang Gyaltso, the 6th Dalai Lama. I can not describe here the incredible beauty of the surroundings and the peace of this hamlet. When I asked the names of the two other 'foreigners', I was told: "Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi". They had come to study the childhood of the Poet/Dalai Lama. It was a touching experience for me to see some of the miracles left by the young lad some 300 hundred years ago (for example a stone in which he made a hole by planting his finger). But the most striking aspect of the place was that the atmosphere was filled with an incredible lightness and liberty. Does it

explain why Tsangyang Gyaltso grew as the most free of the successive Dalai Lamas?

The difficulty is today to outwardly realize this freedom. It is a long and arduous way, however as the present Dalai Lama once wrote in a poem, "Never give up". Both leaders are aware that their people's future depends on perseverance.