

**The decision to start a railway line between China and Lhasa
was made right after 1962**

Exclusive Interview with the Dalai Lama

Claude Arpi for IANS

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On the occasion of a Tibetan Festival for Non-violence jointly organized by eminent dancer Mallika Sarabhai's Darpana, the Kanoria Center for Arts and the local Alliance Française, the Dalai Lama recently spent two days in Ahmedabad. He had the opportunity to address the faculty and students of the Indian Institute of Management. He told them bluntly that he considered himself as a Marxist monk. For him, though the original theory of Karl Marx has been distorted by greed for power, redistribution of wealth is a necessity if humanity is to survive. During a function at the Gujarat Vidyapeet, speaking to a large audience, he said that India and Tibet have a guru-shishya relationship. For the past 1200 years, an Indian, the Buddha has been Tibet's guru. During his hectic schedule, he found the time to speak to Claude Arpi for an exclusive interview for IANS.

Claude Arpi: Your Holiness, the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh recently went to China. Before his visit, several articles appeared in the Indian press stating that under Beijing's pressure, the activities of the Tibetan refugees may be curtailed. Do you have any news of what has happened in Beijing?

The Dalai Lama: I have no information. Perhaps I will get a clearer picture of what happened during the talks sometime later. But it seems that there is no mention about Tibet in the Joint Communiqué. Anyway, the Government of India is not only sympathetic towards to us Tibetans, but because of the border issue, the Government of India needs to keep a clear picture of its past relations with Tibet. I do not think that they will change their position vis-à-vis Tibet. The same policy will remain.

Claude Arpi: One of the arguments of the Chinese historians is that your predecessor, the 6th Dalai Lama (Tsangyang Gyatso) was born in Tawang. The Chinese conclude that the Tawang area therefore belongs to them.

DL: Sometimes the Communists' argumentation is difficult to understand [Laughing].

But regarding the border, since the Simla Conference in 1914, the border has been demarcated. The Conference was attended by three delegations: the Chinese delegation, the British India delegation and the Tibetan, though the final Convention was sealed between the Tibetans and British India only. Because the Chinese refused to sign it at that time, from their point of view, the demarcation is illegal. But since the Tibetan delegation signed the Convention and accepted this demarcation, we today stand by the McMahon Line. It is the border [between India and Tibet].

What has happened before Simla is another matter and it can be studied, but after 1914, after Simla Convention, it is clear for us that south of the Line, it is Indian territory.

CA: Recently, it was reported that the Chinese were building roads and airfields just north of the McMahon Line (in Metok county of southeastern Tibet). It was acknowledged by the Defence Minister himself who said that the Chinese were very much ahead of India in Defence preparedness. What is your opinion?

DL: This is serious, very serious.

I will give you an information. Someone reliable told me that the decision to start a railway line between Mainland China and Lhasa was made right after the Sino-Indian war of 1962. The reason is that during the 1962 conflict, the Chinese military nearly collapsed because of the length of the logistic lines. That is why they had to unilaterally declared a cease-fire and withdraw; they faced too many problems. Because of this experience, Chairman Mao gave immediate instructions to start building a railway link [from China] to Lhasa. But then, soon after, China went through the Cultural Revolution, then there was shortage of funds and later the [economic] development started [under Deng Xiaoping]. Only a few years back, the work could start [it was completed in July 2006]. It is very clear that the concept of the railway is born out military 'business'.

CA: During a public talk this morning, you mentioned about Nalanda University. The Chinese Government said that they are ready to help restoring what was the largest Buddhist University in India. What is your position about this?

DL: It is a good thing. The Chinese Buddhist tradition is similar to the Nalanda tradition. I also heard that in Xian, the ancient Chinese capital

in Shanxi province, the Chinese Buddhist Society is rebuilding a similar Buddhist Institution. I welcome this.

I feel that in the long run, the remedy to the internal problems of China is Buddhist compassion, at least to some extent. Therefore the restoration of the Nalanda University with the help of the Chinese Government is a good thing.

CA: Last year, the Chinese government says that 3,8 millions Chinese have visited Lhasa. Do you see this as a positive or negative development?

DL: This is a complicated issue. One aspect is that many of them remain in Tibet to exploit the resources (particularly the mineral resources of Tibet). This is the negative aspect. Some 10 or 15 ago, in many parts of Tibet, like for example in Western Tibet (Ngari province), there was no Chinese settled here. Recently, I met some journalists of the German Z-TV who visited Ngari region. They showed me the pictures of new Chinese towns besides old Tibetan villages. Even in these remote Tibetan areas, the Chinese population is settling; in places like Rudok or Tholing. This is the negative side [of the train]. There is a demographic aggression.

The positive side is that many Chinese can now easily visit Tibet and the most sensitive amongst them, can get a good picture of what is happening in Tibet. They can meet Tibetans and encounter the rich Tibetan civilization and our cultural heritage. Many Chinese discover that their Government does not give them the proper information [about Tibet]. That is the positive side.

But the problem of population is a very serious one.

I feel that in the interest of the Chinese government, a solution has to be found in the current negotiation between Beijing and my government (who represents 6 million Tibetans). But the demographic aggression is the most serious issue.

I think sooner or later a solution can be found [with the Chinese]. On our part, we can wait, 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, but the demographic issue as well as the environment problems, cannot wait. Once we are able to reach a political solution, it may be too late. If Tibet is only inhabited by Han Chinese, what is the meaning of autonomy?

Like in Inner Mongolia today, it is too late. There is there is more than 80% of Chinese. It is too late.

Q: How does it feel to be a monk?

DL: There are two levels. At the personal level, I follow the life-style of a Buddhist monk, it is simple, though when I traveled there is a lot policemen! [joking]. But my lifestyle is simple; my only luxury is to sleep. Nine hours sleep is really a luxury. In the morning I wake up at 3 am, usually I go to sleep at about 7 pm in the evening.

At the same time, I am one out of 6 billions human beings. We are all part of the same humanity. If one human being suffers, we all suffer. This is the reason why I have to follow what is happening in the world. I mentioned to the Tibetan community this morning that capitalism in the 19th century when Karl Marx expounded his theory against capitalism, capitalism was worse than today. Now it is better, for example the Western capitalism is regulated by rules and there are labour unions. The employers cannot exploit the employees anymore. In a way, today capitalism is not as bad as in the past. And today even

Communists are following Capitalism, it is quite strange, isn't it?
[laughing]

Q: What vision on the world and Tibet in particular.

D: My serious concern is the disparity between poor and rich. It is a global phenomenon; it is also present in India. Even here in Ahmedabad, it is there. This gap is not only morally wrong, but also practically wrong. I find the situation very serious. Yesterday, I said that it is important to look after the poorer sections of the people who work hard. Educate them, give them a good education, provide them with skills and give them self-confidence.

Sometimes, I notice that the so-called untouchables, the *dalits* suffer from some kind of frustration. On the other side, they feel inferior. Though it is in their mind; it is not good. This feeling of inferiority brings frustration, which in turn brings anger. It is not healthy. They need self-confidence. It is important to educate them and use any opportunity to equip them to face life.

Q: In our system of education, we speak about business, ethics, but never about subject like compassion or gaining self-confidence. How do you think that people can imbibe these values, when they are not taught to them?

DL: This is lacking in the so-called modern education. There is something missing. In US or in Europe, the education is first class, but as far as the moral ethics is concerned, either it relies too much on religious faith or it is neglected. There are many people in the West who share my views. Modern education is not fully adequate; we need

some program in our education system to teach warm-heartedness and compassion. We cannot only rely on religious faith, but more on common sense, common experience and scientific findings.

Q: Unfortunately, it is not taught or it is left to parents to teach. If you are lucky, your parents will teach you at home, but we do not receive this type of education in school.

DL: This is a mistake. This should be added to the curriculum. Of course, you can not make examinations about compassion, though it can also be tested. There are today some teachers and some scientists, well-known scientists carrying one month (or 14 days) program of meditation and the development of compassion. They have noticed that after 2 or 3 weeks, there is a difference; the students become more peaceful, less stressed, the blood circulation is better. This subject should be taught.

Q: Today we see everywhere senseless violence and even killings. What would be the message that you would give to the Indian youth.

DL: We are lacking moral education or ethics. Compassion does not only mean to do something nice to other, compassion also brings immense benefits to oneself. Usually people have the impression that the practice of compassion is something good for others, because a compassionate person usually becomes nicer to others, but if you think that it brings good to others only, you are wrong. Compassion immediately brings inner peace and self-confidence to the person practicing it; it is therefore also good for the practitioner.

In my own case, of course we can not say that I am a very compassionate person [laughing]. From time to time I loose my temper, but ill-feeling, I have practically never [experienced]. Whenever I meet people, I feel that they are old friends; a feeling of dislike never comes to my mind. Whether I am meeting a president like George Bush, or a businessman, a scientist, the Holy Pope, or even journalists [laughing], or an AIDS patient or leper, it makes no difference to me, they are all same human being. All deserve the same sense of respect.

Q: In your Middle Way approach, you have agreed to not raise the independence issue providing that you get a genuine autonomy. Will it close the issue of independence for future generations?

DL: The future of Tibet depends on Tibetan people. It is not in my hands. When I meet Chinese people, they are often anxious that Tibet should never be separated from China. I always make it clear to them: "It is up to you! If you treat Tibetans as genuine brothers and sincerely, Tibetans will feel happy and will remain with the people of China. That it is the best guarantee that Tibet will never be separated. If you treat Tibetans like second-class citizens and bully them, how can expect them [to remain with you]?"

[Ultimately] even if I sign some kind of agreement on paper, the Tibetan people will not care. China should be like India, a democratic country. Despite the differences in culture, language, you have freedom here, you can express ourselves, the rule of law prevails. And the press is free, if there is any problem in this country, it immediately reported. A totalitarian regime is a close society. It looks stable and peaceful, but underneath there is a lot of resentment. Look at former

Soviet Union or Yugoslavia under Tito, it looked very stable, resentment was suppressed.

In the case of China, it is the same. 95% of the Tibetans are resentful. In Xinjiang or Inner Mongolia, you will find the same percentage of resentment. Recently I met some Mongolian students and scholars who live in Japan. According to them, the Mongolian population in Inner Mongolia is 5 or 6 millions, this constitutes only 20% of the population; this means that there is more than 20 millions of Chinese. There should be like India some restrictions; for example in Himachal, outsiders can not purchase land.

The reason why we are not seeking independence is because Tibet is backward materially. Spiritually, it was highly advanced because of our Indian gurus. Today, I told the Tibetan community [in Ahmedabad] about Shankarakshita and Kamalashita, two great monks from Nalanda Monastery. These two Buddhist teachers came to Tibet and died in Tibet. They were very famous. They established what we call today Tibetan Buddhist. Till today, we have kept sincerely and faithfully the tradition that these Nalanda masters taught us.

Spiritually, we had the most advanced spiritual tradition. Quite a large number of well-known scientists who have quite a sharp mind, who always question, have shown a genuine interest about Tibetan Buddhist science. Even French are showing interest in Tibetan Buddhism. Some newspapers say that one million French are interested by Buddhism. This does not come out of blind faith, in most of the cases. They investigate, they analyze. We can therefore conclude that as far as spirituality is concerned, Tibet is highly developed.

But materially, it is very backward. At the same time, every Tibetan wants a modern Tibet, for this reason it is better for us to remain

within the People's Republic of China. We can get greater benefits as far as material development is concerned. This is why we are not asking for independence. But because we have a centuries-old cultural heritage including our own language, our own script and a special environment we should therefore have a meaningful autonomy. Except defence and foreign affairs, all other subjects can be handled by the Tibetans themselves. Fifteen, twenty years ago a group of editors came to see me at Dharamsala, I jokingly told them that defence and foreign affairs can be looked after by Chinese Central Government. The reason is that we can not imagine ourselves shooting an Indian. We will never do.

CA: In Amritsar in November you mentioned that the Fifteenth Dalai Lama could be a woman. Could you elaborate?

DL: It is not new. In Tibet, the tradition of having reincarnated teachers is almost 700 years old. Amongst them, there is the institution of a female reincarnation. But till today, all past reincarnation of the Dalai Lamas have been male. In future, in case a female Dalai Lama is more useful to the Buddha Dharma or to the Tibetan nation, then why not to have a woman as reincarnation? Sometimes, I jokingly say that if a Tibetan lady Dalai Lama comes, she will be very very attractive. It will be more useful, because every male will become followers [laughing].

I would like to add something.

In human history, a few hundred thousand years ago, there was some equality in human society. Family members were hunting together, collecting roots together. All worked together. There was no concept of leader, all were equal. With the increase of the population, some

created mischief, cheated, stole. Because this has happened, someone had to be the leader. At that time there was not any kind of education, the leadership depended entirely on physical strength. This marks the beginning of male dominance. Then eventually, language came to be used and education started playing a role.

In modern times, we had very effective woman leadership. In India, you have the example of Indira Gandhi who despite some incidents was very dynamic. Also in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Israel (Mrs Golda Meir), in the UK, women have been leaders. Germany has today a very strong leader, Mrs Merkel who stands by her principles.

But today, I feel that education alone cannot solve all our contemporary problems, we need more emphasis on compassion. Due to biological factors, women are more sensitive about others [human beings], they are more compassionate. Men are more aggressive; often more tough. Take war heroes, they are mostly men.

Therefore, female rule for humanity is perhaps more important than ever, we need not only education but also warmth, sensitivity and compassion. Women are more equipped for this.