

Interview with His Holiness the Dalai Lama

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Dharamsala, 15 May: The Dalai Lama is a busy man. He is just back from Arunachal Pradesh where he visited the celebrated Tawang monastery located near the McMahon line. In a few days, he will be leaving for Tabo in the Spiti valley of Himachal Pradesh. Though he had thought to take some rest and have a short spiritual retreat, he accepted to speak to Claude Arpi and share his thoughts on war and peace, his dialogue with China as well as the triangle India-Tibet-China. During a 75 minute-long interview, his pragmatism permeates all his words. He finds that it is not enough speaking of peace and non-violence. If one seriously wants to avoid war, one has to understand the complexity of the problems, be more pro-active and be able to offer constructive solutions.

Regarding the negotiations with China, he regrets that the public in India is not enough aware of the importance of Tibet for India's security and for maintaining the environment of Himalayas. He wishes to see a greater push from the Indian government side to facilitate a permanent solution for Tibet.

Throughout, his humour and his jokes enlighten the gravity of the problems faced not only by him and his people, but also by the sub-continent and humanity.

At the end of the interview, Arpi's young daughter asked the Dalai Lama why he never reincarnated in a female form. His long explanation makes interesting reading.

The day after the interview, the Tibetan government-in-exile celebrated the 360 anniversary of the Ganden Phodrang. This new form of government, established by the 5th Dalai Lama in the 17th century, put the administration of the Land of Snows under the temporal and spiritual leadership of the successive Dalai Lamas. Once again through that day, he did not rest. But his presence is such a support for his people! He participated in all pujas, official functions and was still there to watch the dances and songs in honour of his illustrious predecessor who created this unusual system of governance by reincarnations. Perhaps the reincarnation of Avalokiteshwara, the Bodhisattva of Mercy, can not rest till all sentient beings are happy and free from misery.

Claude: Your Holiness, just at the beginning of the Iraq war, you have stated that "war is outmoded". Could you explain?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Yes, I said that it is outmoded because we are living in the 21st century and I believe that there are other ways to solve conflicts.

In the 19th or in the beginning of the 20th century, the situation was different. At that time, there were large colonial empires and often these empires resorted to war to solve their problems.

Today, many things have changed, the world has become so small and interdependent that the concept of war has become anachronistic, it is an outmoded approach. Today, it is better to negotiate and talk.

There are many aspects of old traditions, either ill-suited to our present reality or counterproductive due to their shortsightedness. These, we have to consign to the dustbin of history. War too should be relegated to the dustbin of history.

Claude: Do you believe that nothing has been achieved with the Iraq war?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Let us take some historical examples.

I do not know about World War I, but I think the World War II saved western democracy and western civilization at a time when the whole Europe was controlled by the Nazis. The Nazis were very violent and had the same sort of totalitarian dictatorship as the Communists.

I have to tell you [a personal story]: when I was young in Tibet I did not know about Nazism, I only knew about Germany. In fact I knew of only 2 nations: Germany and Italy. I had not heard about France, England, Belgium. [*The Dalai Lama was 5 years old in 1940*]. When I looked at a map, I could see Germany as a very small country. As I knew only Germany, my sympathy was with the Nazis (*Laughing*). I knew Hitler, Goering (*The Dalai Lama does not stop laughing*). At that time, I knew the pictures of all these Generals and Field Marshals. I remember one Field Marshal Von ... something, I can't remember now. (*Laughing again*).

Anyway, the World War II had some positive results: it saved the Western civilization and its values, particularly democracy.

Next, the Korean War: it certainly saved South Korea. The country was not only protected economically, but the war also helped to preserve democracy and freedom, particularly religious freedom.

The Vietnam War was a total failure. It achieved nothing, only destruction and misery; that is all.

Now the Afghan War, I think it achieved some sort of positive results, some form of liberation.

In both the Afghan and the Iraq Wars, although violence was involved, maximum precautions were taken to avoid civilian casualties. Today, when civilian casualties occur, there is an immediate worldwide campaign. [As a result], governments and people take great care to avoid civilian casualties. In a sense, it is a positive result. [It appears that] even wars take a new shape, new form. Worldwide, there is an appreciation for peace, people and NGOs do not want this suffering. The positive result is that even governments now take maximum care. After the Bosnian conflict and the Afghan and Iraq Wars, there is a great world-wide resistance against war.

However, when conflicts are about to start, we need non-government organizations and hopefully individuals like Nobel laureates or some retired political figures (such as for example, Jimmy Carter, a former President of the USA and Nobel Laureate) to take a more active role in trying to avoid conflicts.

Claude: People like Your Holiness?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: I do not know. If I am involved, the Chinese and some other people may become suspicious and it may become an obstacle.

I wish people like Jimmy Carter or Desmond Tutu (though Desmond Tutu may not be very practical in the political field) would get involved. Desmond Tutu is very honest, very good and the moral support of such people is very important, (although I do not know if he will be good in the details of negotiations). But in the case of Jimmy Carter, he knows, he has the skills. I remember sometime ago, he visited North Korea and other places of conflict.

We have to now think of some respected individuals who would have the backing of peace loving people worldwide.

We must have some type of mechanism to handle problems and conflicts. If a problem comes and we just say: "We do not want war", it is not the full answer. The problem must be solved. When someone wants to solve a problem in a violent way, we must be ready with a sort of mechanism to solve the problem [through dialogue]. After even this has failed, then I think, we can not stop people thinking in terms of violence.

Take the Iraq problem: if some respected international figures, not just one individual, several people blessed by the peace loving people from around the world, could have gone there and talked. Frankly, if that had failed, then OK, we would have tried, isn't it?

Claude: It means that you are not thinking in terms of the UN which has failed to solve, amongst others, the Kashmir and Tibetan issues?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: In an article many years ago, I mentioned that the United Nations is the body representing the governments [of the world]. It is not the body of the people of the world. We need some type of body in which individuals will truly represent humanity, not this government or that government, not this nation or that nation.

Obviously, the first interest of the Indian or the United States' representative [in the UN] will be the interests of India or the United States, the interests of their own country, their own nation. That is one problem. Another one is that the United Nations, [the Security Council] with its 5 permanent members is run in an undemocratic way.

In the article I just mentioned, I said that we should have people such as scientists or spiritual leaders (I never mention my name, because some people will immediately have suspicions just hearing my name "The Dalai Lama of Tibet". Therefore my participation will be of no use). But amongst religious leaders, former politicians, judges, lawyers, scientists, (I am thinking for example of Vasclav Havel who retired as Czech President or Jimmy Carter), a body of people [dealing with world problems] should be formed.

(Laughing and jokingly) Amongst French leaders, nobody! I do not know anybody. Perhaps Giscard d'Estaing? But I do not know.

During this recent event, I tried to keep quiet, because it is a very complex, extremely complex issue.

On one side, President Bush and the United States were very determined.

On my side, if I opposed, there is no effect and there is the danger of loosing his sympathy. He was so determined!

Some of my American friends were talking on how to punish France economically. It is silly to go to such an extent. But under these circumstances, my remarks might have been misinterpreted. Of course, if my comments had real effects, it would not matter, but it is not the case.

Some individuals even suggested to me that I should go to Baghdad. First I do not know if Iraq would have allowed me or not, but even if they had allowed me, it was silly *(laughing)*. It would have served no purpose.

Claude: A last question about war. In 1947-48, when the Pakistani raiders invaded Kashmir, some Buddhist Ladakhis such as Col. C. Rinchen [Founder of the Ladakh scouts] fought to save their country

and preserve their Dharma. Do you feel that it is a good action to defend one's own country and religion by the use arms?

I could mention the case of Baltistan which was similar to Ladakh 300 years ago. Today it is fully islamised, there is not a single Buddhist left. Would not the same thing have happened to Ladakh, if these young Buddhists had not fought the intruders?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: To some extent, it is like what I said about the Korean War.

I was told that on the Pakistan side, economically, people are poorer and in the field of education, the situation is worse. I heard that the Indian side is better. Though I know also that there is some resentment in Ladakh [against Srinagar], but in general, the situation is better on the Indian side. If it is true, it [the military action of the Ladakh Scouts] was good.

In the Arunachal State, although we have the McMahon Line, on both sides [India and Tibet], there is the same Tibetan culture, the same spirituality, but because today Arunachal is under Indian administration, at least all the monasteries and other cultural institutions remain. If these areas had remained under Tibetan administration, today they would be controlled by China. It would mean no freedom for institutions like the Tawang monastery. Similarly in Ladakh.

Since 1947-48, many decades have passed and we can see the development, so we can say *"yes, the violent way of protecting Ladakh was reasonable"*.

But there is one problem, when violence starts, the outcome is very unpredictable, so it is better to avoid it. One usually knows about the eventual positive results of violence after many years. It is very

difficult to judge. It is therefore better to avoid violence. For example the American motivations in Vietnam were similar to ones of the Korean War, but the results were just the opposite.

Negotiations with China

Claude: What progress have you made in your negotiations with China, especially after the take-over of the new Chinese leadership.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: We had a good start. We are determined to continue to carry on these contacts. At this moment, we are trying to build up confidence, because there is still a lot of suspicion from the Chinese side. Afterwards, we shall see.

I feel that if there is more contact, there will be more confidence and then more serious discussions can take place.

Hopefully, another visit can take place very soon. That is the only way. We have to accept this even if it is not easy. We shall see.

Claude: Does China agree with you on the geographical definition of Tibet? Or do they consider only the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), excluding the eastern provinces of Amdo and Kham from the purview of the discussions?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Since the Chinese constitution provides the principle of autonomy for all the Tibetan ethnic people, we are trying to get similar rights for all Tibetans [from the TAR and other provinces].

I do not know [if they will accept], we shall see.

We have always been concerned by ALL Tibetans, not only the ones residing in the TAR. If we were seeking separation [from China], then, of course, demanding the other territories [the provinces of Amdo and Kham] would be something difficult [for the Chinese to accept]. But as we have decided to remain within the People's Republic of China, then, it is reasonable that all the ethnic Tibetans get the same rights. How can we make discrimination between Tibetans inside TAR and those outside?

Claude: What do you mean by "genuine autonomy" for Tibetans with the People's Republic of China?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Foreign Affairs and defense will be carried by the Central government. In other words, Tibetans should have the final authority in all the matters that they can handle better. For example, for large scale factories, we might not be able to manage, so we will take Chinese expertise and help. Of course, for Foreign and Defense, which are themselves large subjects, we need the help of the Chinese.

Claude: Suppose tomorrow, the Chinese accept your formula and you leave with them defense matters. The next day, they plan a war against India. What will you do in such a case?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: (*Thinking deeply*). As a Tibetan, it is impossible to think of shooting an Indian. In fact, once a few Indian journalists came here, they were seating where you are today and I explained to them the concept of "genuine autonomy". I told them

jokingly *"it is unthinkable for a Tibetan to open fire towards India, so let the Chinese do that"*. It was a joke (*laughing*).

But in case such a serious situation develops, of course, I will try my best to cool down the conflict, first as a person devoted to peace and against violence, I will express myself and try [to solve the conflict].

Then the best part of my life has been spent in India.

India is also the home of our spirituality, the home of Buddhadharma. For me, the sino-indian relations are so important; conflict should be avoided at any cost. It is what I think.

Claude: Do you see any role for India to facilitate an acceptable solution between the Tibetans and Beijing?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Theoretically, morally India should do something, but how much India can do, I do not know.

Claude: You proposed to transform Tibet into a "zone of Ahimsa". Will it not help solving many security problems for India?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Yes, certainly.

Claude: Has Mr Fernandes spoken about Tibet while he was in China?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: I do not know, I have not met him.

I am quite sure that he mentioned Tibet. I have seen a newspaper report which said that the dialogue China-Dalai Lama was discussed. It is something in the interest of the 3 parties [China-India-Tibet]. It was what I have read in a newspaper. But in actual fact, I do not know, but Mr Fernandes is sympathetic and quite bold.

The Chinese side is very pragmatic. They invited a person who had said that China is the enemy No. 1 of India. It is a very practical move [to invite him] (*laughing*).

Claude: Are Chinese people always very pragmatic people?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Oh, yes, very!

Claude: The Indian public is not aware of the close link between India's security and the fate of Tibet?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Yes, yes, that is right! That is the point! I always tell my Indian friends, more discussions should be held, more public awareness meetings; more activities should be conducted [to highlight the Tibetan issue and its consequences for India]. Even things like this interview are important.

Hopefully, [the public awareness in India] will increase.

The Tibetan issue is related to the long northern Indian border and its defense. It is also linked to the environment and the preservation of the Himalayan ecology.

Therefore, the Indian public should have a better knowledge, a better awareness about the reality of the Tibetan issue, particularly its relations with the boundary question and the Himalayan environment.

Some discussions should be held with people involved in environment issues, including people who have worked for the preservation of the ecology in the Himalayan range.

And now India has a problem of water, people should think more about such issues and discuss more on how to preserve the snows of the Himalayan mountains.

Claude: Sometimes ago, I had written about the Interlinking of the Indian rivers and the importance of the rivers coming from Tibet (Brahmaputra, Sutlej, Indus). The Indian planners have usually neglected this aspect though we know very well that the course of a river such as Brahmaputra can be changed. Your Holiness mentioned in your book Freedom in Exile that on August 15, 1950 the course of the Brahmaputra was changed by an earthquake. Do you have any comments?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: I remember that one day in the early sixties, one man from Xinjiang [Chinese province of Eastern Turkistan] came to see me. He was an ex-minister of the local government from Ugyur nationality. While we were having some food, (it was not here, it was in my previous residence in Dharamsala), he told me that there is a real danger in the future of China changing the course of the major Tibetan rivers towards the deserts of Xinjiang or Gobi areas.

The Chinese can do it! If that happens, what will happen to India? At that time, I thought that it was very difficult, but now I think that it is possible. For example, look at the Three Gorges project, the Chinese can undertake such big projects.

In fact in Tibet, it is easier, arrangements can be made to divert rivers because [the Tibetan plateau] geographically slopes from higher areas to lower areas.

[To make such diversion] on a few hundred kilometers, from Kongpo in Southern Tibet to Northern Tibet, is not that difficult.

Claude: Two years back, all the roads were washed away in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh by the break of a dam in Tibet. It had

very serious strategic and economic consequences for this area of the Himalayas. Do you see such danger recurring?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: India needs to do some efforts to educate [itself].

(long silence).

Compared to Indians, Chinese are more hard working. They like to undertake such huge projects.

Claude: From the Tibetan side, would it help India to officially recognize McMahon Line and say the Aksai Chin as part of India?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: In many occasions, I did it.

The McMahon line was finalized by a Tibetan government delegation [at the tripartite Simla Convention in 1914], so we recognize it, we accept it. In many occasions, I mentioned to my Indian friends that India's position is quite weak. Because, India does not recognize that the Tibetan government had the authority to finalize the international border *[the McMahon line is based on an agreement signed between the governments of British India and Tibet]*

The Chinese delegation refused to put its final seal the agreement [though they initialed the map in 1914], therefore from the Chinese point of view, it is illegal.

Our position is very clear. During my first visit to Tawang monastery [Arunachal Pradesh], journalists had asked my position on the McMahon line. I gave the same answer. From the Tibetan side, If we want to show the world that Tibet had the authority to make international agreements, we have to accept [the consequences] of these agreements.

Regarding the Aksai Chin, I do not know.

(Jokingly and laughing) It should be given to the Gods or perhaps ghosts. *(Laughing)*. I really do not know to whom it belongs.

Claude: Could it belong to two countries? In international law, there is the concept of a condominium. States like Andorra had two heads of the states, two suzerains (France and Spain).

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: I did not know that.

Claude: Do you think that this concept could help solving many problems of the world?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Oh, yes, certainly! It is good idea.

Claude: Do you see big changes coming in China?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: In the long run, yes! But in the near future, I do not think so. I feel that gradual change will take place and it is better like that.

During the last 20 years, gradual changes have occurred. It is good and healthy.

Claude: Do you place some hope in the young new leadership of China?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Until a few years ago, there was not much change in the attitude and thinking of the leadership. But the situation has changed, nobody can stop certain changes; today there

are new realities. The government is [automatically] forced to change. That is happening.

Claude: Your Holiness, my daughter would like to ask you a question?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Ask!

Smiti Arpi: I have heard that when you reincarnate, you can choose when and where you will reincarnate and also if you will come back as a girl or a boy, but till now, you have always reincarnated as a boy. Is there any reason for that?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: All the Dalai Lamas have been male and except the 6th the Dalai Lama, all of them have been monks. The reason is that it was more useful, it was a more effective way to serve the Buddhadharma.

It seems that the 5th Dalai Lama [during the 17th century] may have had different plans. My analysis is based on the study of the autobiography of the 5th Dalai Lama: he seems to have been thinking in terms of changing the system of succession of Dalai Lamas from a reincarnation lineage [at the death of a Dalai Lama, his reincarnation is found and later empowered], to a father-son [lineage]. Like today the throne holder of Sakya lineage [second Lama in the Tibetan hierarchy] empowers his son to take over from him.

It seems that the 5th Dalai Lama had made such plans and it explains that the 6th Dalai Lama deliberately gave up monk vows to see if the plan could go smoothly. I think that the 5th Dalai Lama preferred this system of succession (father-son lineage like the Sakya Lama). At least, the succession could have been less chaotic.

Claude: Do you mean during the regency?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Regency is a disruption. Many unfortunate things happened during regencies. After the death of 13th Dalai Lama, I had 2 regents. Of course, both of them were my teachers, my gurus and I respect them and I had full faith in them, however their conduct was not always up to the mark, sometimes even harmful [to Tibet's interests].

My point is that if in certain circumstances, a female form is more useful, then certainly a female form will come.

Then, amongst Tibetan reincarnations, there are also female reincarnations. One of the highest reincarnations [in Tibet] was Samding Dorjee Phagmo. She reincarnates always as a female.

Day before yesterday, I received a history book of Kham province. It is published in Tibet. It is the story of a Lama called Demmo Lama who had many reincarnations. One of these reincarnations was a very very beautiful woman. She lived 113 years. Until she was about 100 years old, she retained the beauty of a woman of 20/30 years old.

(Laughing) So, you see a very high Lama can reincarnate in a female form.

And we had [in Tibet] institution such as the one of Samding Dorjee Phagmo, which was 800 years old with only female reincarnation. In 1959, Dorjee Phagmo escaped to India and in early 1960, she returned to Tibet.

(Jokingly and laughing) One female reincarnation, one disgrace *(The Dalai Lama can not stop laughing at his own joke)*.

Claude: Where is Dorjee Phagmo now?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: She was living in Kalimpong [in 1959] and one day she disappeared. She later reappeared in Lhasa. Then she became a Chinese puppet. During the Cultural Revolution, she suffered a lot.

But she was a very high incarnation. In 1951, I had gone to Yatung [near the Indian border in Chumbi Valley] to Lhasa. On the way back, I stopped at many important monasteries, including Samding monastery [where Dorjee Phagmo lived] and I met her. She had a very large entourage of very senior officials and Lamas accompanying her, like the Sakya Lama or the Karmapa. They were all males.

Her rank was even higher than Karmapa's, she was almost like Sakya who was considered as No. 2 [in the hierarchy]. In fact, it is only since the 5th Dalai Lama took the temporal power that he became No. 1. Before, it was the Sakya Lama who was the most important.

Claude: Thank you very much, Your Holiness!