



# Glimpses on The History of Tibet

## *an Introduction*

On January 20, 2009, His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Auroville to inaugurate the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. Before leaving, he suggested that we work on an exhibition on the History of Tibet. The present display is our answer to His Holiness.


At the beginning of the 20th century, Sri Aurobindo spoke of 'India of the Ages', an India which he described thus: *"Spirituality is the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it. India saw from the beginning that the physical does not get its full sense until it stands in right relation to the supra-physical; she saw that the complexity of the universe could not be explained in the present terms of man or seen by his superficial sight, that there were other powers behind, other powers within man himself of which he is normally unaware, that he is conscious only of a small part of himself, that the invisible always surrounds the visible, the suprasensible the sensible, even as infinity always surrounds the finite."*

This could also apply to Tibet which for millennia, and long before the introduction of Buddhism, looked 'inside' to discover the secrets of the Spirit. This is clearly the thread linking these glimpses of the political history of the Roof of the World.

We have faced several difficulties in preparing the exhibition. One was how to slice several millennia of history (His Holiness suggested that the latest archaeological discoveries be mentioned) in 25 portions without betraying the flow of events and people. Impossible, said the experts, unfortunately (in fact fortunately) we had no choice but to try. This exhibition should be seen as 25 snapshots of this ancient nation's history.

The two thankas presented by His Holiness gave a direction to our search. The first, depicts Santarakshita and Padmasambhava, who established the roots of Buddhism in Tibet, particularly the Nalanda lineage and the Indian Tantrik tradition respectively; the second thanka of the Three Religious Kings demonstrates the military strength of the Tibetan Empire at one point in history; in His Holiness's words: *"There have been occasions when Tibetan rulers conquered vast areas of China and other neighbouring states. This, however, does not mean that we Tibetans can lay claim to these territories."*

These Glimpses demonstrate that in the past Tibet was an independent nation and though for sometime it lived in isolation, during most of the last 4000 years Tibet had constant contacts and interactions with the neighbouring nations and in many cases was influenced by other cultures.



*Our history, dating back more than two thousand years, has been one of independence. At no time, since the founding of our nation in 127 BC, have we Tibetans conceded our sovereignty to a foreign power. As with all nations, Tibet experienced periods in which our neighbors — Mongol, Manchu, Chinese, British and the Gorkhas of Nepal sought to establish influence over us. These eras have been brief and the Tibetan people have never accepted them as constituting a loss of our national sovereignty.*

**His Holiness the Dalai Lama**

