

**And Long and Dark
shall be the Night**

The Karma of Tibet



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Introduction

There are two who are unfit for greatness and freedom, the man who has never been slave to another and the nation that has never been under the yoke of the foreigner.

Sri Aurobindo

When the Shining Went

After studying for several decades the history of Modern Tibet, a question has always remained present in my mind: why has this tragedy befallen on the Land of Snows. After all, a similar destiny could have been the fate of Nepal or Bhutan, but why Tibet only? There are many historical answers to this question, but they do not answer all the aspects of a complex problem. A beginning of a response to my question was once touched upon during an interview with the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan spiritual leader explained that his people believe that 'luck' or 'good karma' can be seen shining on someone's forehead:

Somehow, the shining of our forehead had vanished at one point. [Earlier] there was some kind of ray or shine which means a 'force of good karma' or 'luck' (which had now disappeared).

Somehow, it was not there anymore [in the fifties].

...at the time India became independent in 1947 or even before, something went wrong, Even from the purely spiritual field, many believed that in 1920's or 1930's if some puja had been done in time, this tragic thing would not have come. In the world politics also, if the Tibetan Government had continuously sent Tibetan students from the first batch amongst our civil servants then, at least a few hundreds would have been

speaking English and naturally they would have been able to deal with foreigners. It was important to safeguard Tibetan independence and the Tibetan rights. I think that for the last forty years from a hopeless situation we regained some footing. [Showing his forehead and laughing] Some shining is coming again on the Dalai Lama's head, little, little with the help of the [Tibetan] people.

This could also be the beginning of an explanation to another factor witnessed by all those watching the Tibetan scene, why are the Tibetans taking their tragedy so lightly?

Do they perceive some shine coming slowly back on the Tibetan leader's forehead? Probably the words of Shantideva are also present in the mind of the Tibetan people and guide their attitude towards life and death.

*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?*

This notion of 'karma' came again and again in the interviews and discussions with Tibetans officials and ordinary folks.

But what is Karma?

We have first to point out that 'karma' does not belong to any particular religion. Who could pretend that physics or chemistry belongs to only one way of thinking or a group of people only? Similarly, 'karma' is more a law of nature. While 'physical sciences' have been studied more in depth in the West, in the case of the laws of karma, more profound researches was undertaken in the East, particularly in India and Tibet.

In India, the Vedas and the Upanishads already knew about this nearly 'physical' law. A Vedic scholar, David Frawley wrote an interesting definition:

In the Vedic view all life is a ritual; that is, all life is a repeated action which produces certain subtle or occult results. It is these results which determine our future condition and the state of the world we live in. Each action has a certain effect which determines who we are and what we will become. ...Whatever this may be, whether it is making money or seeking truth, this is our worship or way of directing our energies in life and must have certain consequences. In the Upanishads this secret doctrine of karma and rebirth is first explained in rational and philosophical terms.

The doctrine of karma, by the common understanding, means "as you sow, so shall you reap". By this many take it to mean that those who are rich and affluent in life must be reaping the rewards of past good actions, while those who are poor and destitute are paying back for previous misdeeds.

This is the popular understanding of karma. Rich have a good karma and poor don't. This would only depend on one's parameters for happiness and if one goes by Deng Xiaoping's slogan: to be rich is glorious, if China become wealthier, it could be considered as a good karma. It may not be so.

I still remember the summer of 1971. During my university holidays, I decided to visit Afghanistan. While in Kabul I heard some hippies speaking about what they called a 'cool' place called 'Manali' in the Indian Himalayas. I was even told that 'cool' Tibetan refugees were living there. Something clicked in my head (or was it in my heart?). My immediate resolve was "I must go and see these 'cool' guys!" I made up my mind to come to India as soon as possible and visit the mysterious 'Manali.'

The very next year, I did manage to travel to India and though I could hardly speak English, I was adamant to make the trip to Manali. I reached Palam Airport early in the morning, jumped into a cab for the old Delhi Railway Station and boarded the first available train to the North. From Chandigarh I took a bus and on the second day, we reached Kulu from where an old bus took us on the final climb to Manali. It was on the road between Kulu and Manali that I saw my first Tibetan. This encounter was to change my life, though in rags thee guy was smiling.

Much later I was 'explained' that it must have been my karma to meet this Tibetan! I soon discovered how important this word was. In India or in Tibet for that matter, everything that happens can probably be explained by this only word, 'karma.' In a way it is useful to be able to rationalise so easily whatever we cannot understand with our little white (or even brown) man's brain. People in Asia believe in the truth behind this word and indeed it is very practical!

During the following weeks I travelled to many places in the Himalayas and I had the occasion to meet many Tibetan refugees who had been rehabilitated by the Indian Government in the hill stations. Most of them were working on the construction and repair of high-altitude strategic roads. They were also smiling.

I visited Dharamasala, Dalhousie, Mussoorie, Kathmandu and many other remote hill stations and the more I met with these peculiar people, the more I became interested in their way of being as well as their history. They had lost everything: their country, their wealth, very often many members of their family and still they could stand on the road and smile.

How could someone educated in a Cartesian country with a modern utilitarian education understand this bizarre phenomenon? We are taught that if one loses everything important and dear in life, one

must be sad and grim-faced, there are no two ways about it. In the beginning I thought that the experience of the Chinese invasion and the destruction of their thousand-year old civilization had been too much for them and that something had cracked in their brains. It might have been true for a few individuals, but a similar experience repeated itself in so many different places, with so many different people. These guys were indeed cool, as the hippies in Kabul had told or they were cracked. Or the other alternative was that there was something that I could not understand. This was my first contact with the 'karma' of Tibet.

While in Dharamsala, in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, I met their leader, the Dalai Lama and I began to understand something that I had not so far understood: these people had a different set of values than westerners have. They may have lost their material wealth and their country, but they had not lost the deeper human qualities which we call peace of mind or compassion. This was their strength. And their leader was the living example of these qualities. In seeing this 'simple monk', as he prefers to call himself, I saw that inner strength and the power of compassion are qualities which are practically unknown today in the world. This monk seemed the embodiment of a wisdom which was part of the spiritual and cultural heritage of a nation that had spent most of its time looking 'within', into the heart of man.

Perhaps in the West we spend too much time looking 'outside.' We have been looking to the 'outside' to try to find out how to control the material world and the nature around us, but in the process, we have forgotten the inner qualities and powers of the spirit. Did that Tibetan road worker have the lost key to our number one problem: how to live a contented and happy life?

But one question kept on troubling me: why had this tragedy befallen Tibet?

Why had they lost their Himalayan Shangri-La? Was it not a Divine injustice?

The answer is of course 'karma'. But what is really behind this word? What terrible sins had the Tibetans committed to invite such so-called karmic retribution?

But let us continue with Frawley's description:

Such attitudes of karma are simplistic and erroneous because karma is based upon the inner reality of things, not upon the outer names and forms of the world. Karma as a spiritual law is not adjusted according to our various and conflicting cultural definitions of success and failure. Our life and consciousness is like an iceberg, the greater portion of it lies beneath the waters of our ordinary awareness. As long as we only judge the visible portion of things we will come to many wrong conclusions about reality. Karma as a spiritual law must apply to the whole reality of man, not just to the preconceptions or prejudices of the surface mind and emotions.

This gives another dimension to the word 'karma', it is not pure material retribution, but it has different and more profound layers which could explain better the fate of Tibet. As put by Frawley: "*In this regard good fortune in life may be a sign of a strong ego, while suffering may occur to us to awaken us to the truth behind the outer forms of things. More evolved souls may choose more difficult incarnations, while less evolved souls may require comfort and ease. It is like mountain climbers. The beginners must take only the easy slope, while the experienced go after difficult inclines.*

This could explain many things in the recent history of the Roof of the World.

Like Hindus Tibetans believe that whatever happens today is the fruit of yesterday's actions. For the Buddhist, any actions, any thought

has a power to produce another action or thought, in this world and in other words. Each action has a direct consequence which is bound to appear in the future.

There is nothing such as action without a reaction or a consequence. The events of today are the results of hundreds of different actions or forces or strings pulled yesterday; some of these events which occurred in the past were important, some less, but all have produced a consequence. And even our reactions to today's events will have its consequences tomorrow or the day after.

It seems an infernal machine and for the Buddhist the aim of the game is to stop the machine and put an end to the suffering.

It is often from this point of view that Tibetans like to explain their history.

Though we will not go into the validity of their view as it is a matter of belief in a basic hypothesis (the existence of the law of karma), nevertheless if the Tibetans firmly believe in a certain concept of life and consider it an important factor, it cannot be ignore while studying their recent history.

Perhaps the clearest account of the concrete consequences of the concept of karma can be found in the Testament of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. It is a unique document written by the Dalai Lama one year before his death in 1933. We will come back to it later.

Where is the so-called bad karma come from?

Whether one believes in the notion of Karma or not, one point is obvious to all: any political decision involving a nation has its consequences.

Take the decision to close down Tibet to the outside world in the 19th century and again at the beginning of the 20th century, one immediate consequence has been that when most of the nations of the world joined the League of Nations and later the United Nations

Organisation, Tibet was left out with the consequence which can still be seen today.

Another example: when a split occurred between the two main religious leaders in Tibet, even if we keep aside the religious and philosophical fall out, in political terms, the consequences have been incalculable.

It is therefore of great interest to try to discover what could be termed as 'negative karma' in the recent history of Tibet, keeping in mind that 'karma' is taken more in the sense of 'action' than with in a religious or philosophical connotation.

Before going in the potential actions which created negative consequences or bad karma for Tibet in the course of the 20th century, let us, for an instant, go back 2500 years back and listen to the words of the Buddha who, in one of his last sermons, warned of the danger of disunity in the society and in the Sangha.

At the end of his life Buddha summoned all the Bhikkhus in Rajagaha and taught them the seven conditions of welfare for the benefit of his disciples.

(1) As long, O disciples, as the Bhikkhus assemble frequently and hold frequent meetings, (2) as long as the Bhikkhus meet together in unity, rise in unity, and perform the duties of the Sangha in unity; (3) as long as the Bhikkhus shall promulgate nothing that has not been promulgated, abrogate not what has been promulgated, and act in accordance with the already prescribed rules; (4) as long as the Bhikkhus support, respect, venerate and honour those long-ordained Monks of experience, the fathers and leaders of the Order, and respect their worthy speech; (5) as long as the Bhikkhus fall not under the influence of uprisen attachment that leads to repeated births; (6) as long as the Bhikkhus shall delight in forest retreats; (7) as long as the Bhikkhus develop mindfulness within themselves so that

*disciplined co-celibates who have not come yet may do so and those who are already present may live in peace, so long may the Bhikkhus be expected not to decline, but to prosper. As long as these seven conditions of welfare shall continue to exist amongst the Bhikkhus, as long as the Bhikkhus are well-instructed in these conditions, so long may they be expected not to decline, but to prosper.*¹

Who remembered these prophetic words at the beginning of the century in Tibet?

In addition, the Buddha added that the monks should be devout, modest, conscientious, full of learning, persistently energetic, constantly mindful and full of wisdom. In these conditions, he said Buddhism would not decline, but prosper.

It is probably because the monks and lay population seemed to have forgotten these basic principles at the beginning of the twentieth century that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama issued a strong warning in the form of his Last Testament. He did not succeed as the intrigues and the power struggles between the great monasteries and aristocracy or between the monasteries themselves continued to be prevalent, creating further 'karma'.

The Buddha had also told his disciples:

As long as the Bhikkhus shall not be fond of, or delight in, or engage in, business; as long as the Bhikkhus shall not be fond of, or delight in, or engage in, gossiping; as long as the Bhikkhus shall not be fond of, or delight in, sleeping; as long as the Bhikkhus shall not be fond of, or delight in, or indulge in, society; as long as the Bhikkhus shall neither have, nor fall under, the influence of base desires; as long as the Bhikkhus shall not have evil friends or associates and shall not be prone to

¹ Narada Maha Thera, *The Buddha and his Teachings* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980), p. 235.

*evil - so long the Bhikkhus shall not stop at mere lesser, special acquisition without attaining Arahantship.*²

Was it the case in the early 20th century? It is worth spending some time to look at the situation on the Roof of the World when the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was still reigning.

The Thirteenth Dalai Lama, a Progressive leader

At this point, it might be interesting to try to list the actions or decisions which 'accumulated', could have generated this 'bad karma'. Many of these actions have been mentioned by the Dalai Lama himself who played the most crucial role at the first decades of the 20th century in Tibet. Thubten Gyaltso, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was in many ways a remarkable liberal and progressive leader.

Would his advice and warning have been followed, could have many things been different?

We could list a few examples, which show how he tried to pull his nation on the road to the modern world: he officially declared Tibet's independence in 1913; he took the revolutionary initiative of sending a group of young Tibetans to England to study technologies, which could be useful to his country; he recruited and trained an army to defend his borders and maintain Tibet's independence; he reformed the monastic discipline; he saw the great importance for Roof of the World of having balance relations with the Great Powers (British India, China, Russia and Mongolia). During the First World War, he was ready to support the Allies. He even tried, through his friend Sir Charles Bell, to take the first steps to join the League of Nations. Unfortunately for Tibet, he had to struggle against the power of the big monasteries, which were opposed to any opening to the outside world, fearing that their religion would loose of its purity. But one

² Narada, op. cit. p. 236.

could ask: how could the Vajrayana or Diamond Vehicle lose its purity. Was the diamond so impure?

Thubten Gyatso also had to cope with the intrigues of his own aristocracy and the imperialist designs of the British and Chinese. The present Dalai Lama commented about the trials of Thirteenth Dalai Lama when he tried to introduce a British school in Gyantse in the twenties: "*If the Thirteenth's attempt to introduce modern education into Tibet had not met such intense resistance by traditionalists, our history may have taken quite a different turn*". In the midst of powerful neighbours and the resistance to progress inside Tibet, Thubten Gyatso tried his best to bring Tibet into the twentieth century without losing Tibet's special identity

Policy of isolation

The Tibetan Government's first 'wrong' was undoubtedly its policy of isolation. Though an opening to the outside world had started when the Thirteenth Dalai Lama came back from exile in India in 1912, due to the internal pressure from the conservative monasteries, it was unfortunately soon dropped. Speaking about the Karma of Tibet, the present Dalai Lama once remarked:

"Unfortunately, throughout this period [between 1912 and 1950] Tibet did not take active steps to make contacts with the outside world and international bodies and thus prove her independence because it did not seem necessary to the Tibetans. Instead, Tibet made the mistake of following a policy of isolation whereby she thought that she could detach herself from the turmoil of international politics.

To illustrate this policy of isolation, one could take a few examples which demonstrate the harm done to the Roof of the World. The different power struggles between Tsarong Shap and Lungshar and

then Lungshar and Kunphela, the favourites of the Dalai Lama are a few cases in point.

The Thirteenth Dalai Lama tried hard to break this isolation in sending some Tibetan kids to England; his idea was to have Tibetans regularly studying outside Tibet. But the big monasteries were not able to understand his vision and the experience had to stop.

It has also to be noted that in 1920 the Dalai Lama tried to approach the League of Nations³ to see if Tibet could become a member state. If the move had succeeded, it would have given international recognition to the de facto independence which Tibet then enjoyed. Only a handful of his countrymen could understand his reasoning at that time, and the great monasteries and many aristocratic families who were more interested in their personal privileges did not support him in his approach. Fear of losing their privileges led them to not accept, much less undertake, the necessary reforms.

It can only be said that it was a missed opportunity. Could the fate of Tibet have been different? Difficult to say, but one fact is certain — it would not have been so easy for China to 'liberate' Tibet.

The situation in Tibet during the late forties was peaceful and harmonious, but the world around it was changing fast.

The Rule by Incarnation

If conscious insulation was the Government of Tibet's main 'mistake', it was certainly not the only one. The Tibetan political system had itself serious inherent weaknesses.

Though, at many points of views, it can be seen as an ideal system of governance, the 'rule by incarnation' established at the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama had a serious flaw. During the interregnum between the death of a Dalai Lama and the majority of his new reincarnation,

³ Though Sir Charles Bell, see Tsering Shakya, *Tibet and the League of Nations* (Dharamsala: Tibet Journal, Vol. 10, No. 3), p. 48-56.

Tibet witnesses a period of fifteen to twenty years of political vacuum.

The Regents of Tibet have not always been to the standard and very often were not politically prepared to look after the affairs of the State. The Chinese through their Ambans or Representatives made use of this weakness of the system. It was rumoured that the premature death of the 9th to the 12th Dalai Lamas⁴ was not a mere coincidence and the Chinese Ambans certainly took full advantage of their departure.

Divided Nation

It is necessary to look at the divisions inside the Tibetan society. We have just mentioned about the intrigues between aristocrats and the negative role of the big monasteries, but we shall look at the split between the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the Ninth Panchen Lama, and the collaterals still visible today.

The antagonism between the Lhasa administration and the chieftains of Kham and Amdo and the confrontation between the leaders of these different provinces between themselves were not a unifying factor.

Finally, we shall see that after the passing away of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, disputes and dissension broke between different factions of the Government and the great monasteries, the struggle degenerated into a sad dispute between the last two Regents of Tibet (Reting and Taktra). This is another very serious example of a divided society.

A Society which did not accept contradictions

⁴ Five Dalai Lamas were born during the 19th century, none of them (except the 13th) reigned for more than a few years. It gives an idea of the weakness of the system.

Another negative aspect of the old Tibetan society should also be mentioned: it had great difficulties to accept contradictions. It was not only the Dalai Lama or Tsarong Shape who faced adversity, but all those who dared thinking differently. For the purpose of this study, we will go through the case of the great scholar from Amdo, Gedun Choepell and its problems with his time and his own society.

The Testament: The Night shall be long and dark

But let us first go into the details of the Last Testament of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. In 1932, one year before he died, the Dalai Lama warned the people of Tibet against certain ills of the Tibetan society.

A few months earlier the Dalai Lama had expressed the wish to withdraw from public life: *"I am now of advanced age and it is time I relinquished secular and spiritual duties so that I can start earning merit and concentrate on religious studies, keeping well in mind the future which is what really matters."*

After the Government and the people of Tibet had supplicated him to continue guiding them, he accepted to continue, but exhorted his people to work hard for the welfare of Tibet:

However, the Gods whom I followed like a shadow, the venerable teachers, those who reveres me, those who offered me their wealth and property, the rich and the poor, they, my subjects, all have not only in words but in heart imposed upon me their hopes and aspirations. Because of this, I can not think of giving up my responsibilities.

..Now, when there is peace and happiness, when you have the power, work earnestly, and wholeheartedly for the general welfare. Use peaceful methods where peace is due, use force where force is necessary: work and persevere now, that there is now regret later.

In your hands, officials of the Government, holders of the Teachings and my people, lies the future of the country. Without employing wrong and base methods, rise up together and work for the general good of the land...

... For my part, to those who work and persevere for the general good, I offer them my prayers and blessings. For those who only

work for their own welfare, the fate and Karma will take care of them. Though they might prosper for some time, leaving aside their Government duties and watching the time pass all I see is disaster in the future. It would be too late then to regret.

The Dalai Lama particularly emphasised: "*Maintain friendly relations with the two great powers, China and India, conscript able soldiers to guard the borders and make them sufficiently strong to ward off those countries with whom we have had border disputes...*"

One of his main concerns was to have a strong and self-reliant Tibet and for this a modern and well-trained army was a necessity. It has to be noted that he advised his people: "*use force where force is necessary*".

Even as a Buddhist teacher, he never felt that 'force' or self-defence was against the principles taught by Buddha. In fact, most of the problems faced by the Dalai Lama began⁵ around the recruiting and the training of this national army.

At the end of his Testament, he warned his people of the forthcoming 'dark days':

In my lifetime conditions will be as they are now, peaceful and quiet. But the future holds darkness and misery. I have warned you of these things because of my experience and other important reasons. More I cannot say or advise.

...The institutions of the Dalai Lama, venerable incarnates and those who protect the Teachings shall be wipe out completely. Monasteries shall be looted, properties shall be confiscated and all living beings shall be destroyed. The memorable rule of the Three Guardian Kings of Tibet, the very institutions of the State and religion shall be banned and forgotten. The properties of the officials shall be confiscated; they shall be slaves of the

⁵ The Dispute with the Panchen Lama, the removal from Tsarong as Commander-in-Chief, the intrigues between his attendants, etc...

conquerors roam land in bondage. All souls shall be immersed in suffering and the night shall be long and dark..."

It is necessary to add anything. The content of the Last Testament and the events of the following decades on the Roof of the World make of this text the most truly prophetic document ever written.

The Karma of Tibet

How do Tibetans see the working this famous karma in relations with their modern history? In other words, what role 'karma' plays in the historical perspective of what has happened to the Tibetan nation? Through out our research, most of the interviewees' answers was on similar lines, but we specifically asked a scholarly Tibetan Lama on the question of Karma of Tibet. He made some interesting remarks which are worth looking at. For the sake of simplification, we will refer to him as the Lama.

If one looks at history with Tibetan (or Buddhist) eyes, especially at the relations between India, China and Tibet, one does not only deal with historical events, but movements, currents (or sometimes undercurrents), which have a much deeper significance.

Like for Frawley: *"our life and consciousness is like an iceberg, the greater portion of it lies beneath the waters of our ordinary awareness"*; the same way, history for the Tibetans is like an iceberg and we are only aware of the most superficial consequences. These large world movements are usually termed as "historical events". Would it not be more correct to say that they are glimpses of Himalayan peaks ignoring the depth and breadth of the surrounding mountain ranges? Whenever we questioned Tibetans about their history, they said: *"Our 'bad' karma had to be exhausted"*. For the Lama, the recent history of Tibet was like a wave that nothing could stop.

We raised several questions: from where does this 'bad' karma come? Is it selective? When was it accumulated? How many years or decades did it take before "ripening"?

To these questions, the Lama said: *"The Tibetans are human beings just like any other beings in the rest of the world: there is not much difference. In the past, we, Tibetans accumulated a lot of negative*

karma but at the same time did enjoy very much the consequences of previous good karma and this, for many years. Between the World War I and II, we were enjoying life. During this period we enjoyed too much the results of our previous positive actions and we did not want to think of the results of the bad karma which were accumulating”.

The old Tibetan society, at least in the first decades of the 20th century, enjoyed life. It is especially true for the aristocracy who had a life of pleasure and enjoyment, a life of “silk brocade and picnic”. It is enough to read the books of the explorers till the end of the forties to understand that Old Tibet was a very harmonious and protected world living in another time. The conclusions of the westerners like Heinrich Harrer and Robert Ford who stayed in Tibet just before the Chinese arrival are similar and unanimous: every one was enjoying life on the Roof of the World. They probably realise that it was the end of an era and that soon nobody will be able to witness the same old Tibet?

There was undoubtedly a great difference in the life conditions of the aristocracy (lay and monastic) and the ‘working class’ but everyone seemed happy and enough to eat. Despite the hardship of daily existence, life was peaceful and somehow harmonious.

It is perhaps this image of peace and harmony, which gave birth to the perception of a mythical Land which caught the imagination of the West.

This incredible harmony was not restricted to the people of different strata of the society, there was also a harmony with the nature and even with the gods. For many, Tibet was Shangri-La, the paradise on earth, and the fact that Tibet was closed to the outside world helped to contribute to the magic of the Land of Snow.

It is probably what the Thirteenth Dalai Lama realised: his people lived such a happy life that they forgot to think about the future.

They refused to accept that the earth was round⁶ and that the world around them was changing at a quick pace. They did not accept the changes brought by the industrial and democratic revolutions and the anti-colonialist power struggle which were transforming the face of the planet.

The Thirteenth Dalai Lama had also seen the Red wave pointing on the horizon. He had heard of Mongolia and Russia and was aware of what was happening there in the name of a new religion founded by a certain Karl Marx.

This religion was more sectarian than any other in the past. For the new High Priests⁷, all other religions were considered as poisonous and the new missionaries of the Communist dogma wanted to spread the new dogma to every corner of the planet. The new religion had no morale; it could kill thousands or millions of people⁸ in the name of the 'People' and this without remorse. And to make the things worse, it represented only a class of people, the proletariat or working classes, all other sections of the society had to be subdued by force. It was particularly bothersome for the sacerdotal class in Tibet.

In his vision or wisdom the Thirteenth Dalai Lama prophesied the Red wave would invade Asia and stream rolling Tibet.

Could Tibet wake up before it was too late? But who wants to wake up from dream where everything is heavenly and tranquil?

As Sri Aurobindo wrote at the beginning of the 20th century: *"There are moments when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being; there are others*

⁶ We shall later see how the scholar Gedun Choepell got mad with his Guru, the famous Geshe Sherab Gyatso who argued with him that the earth was flat.

⁷ Like Stalin or Mao Zedung.

⁸ Like during the great famine or in the Goulag in Russia or during the Great Leap Forward or the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China.

when it retires and men are left to act in the strength or the weakness of their own egoism. The first are periods when even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny; the second are spaces of time when much labour goes to the making of a little result. ...Unhappy is the man or the nation which, when the divine moment arrives, is found sleeping or unprepared to use it, because the lamp has not been kept trimmed for the welcome and the ears are sealed to the call."

When the destiny of many nations was taking a new turn towards freedom, Tibet had gone into a sort of nirvana, forgetting the world around and keeping its ears sealed.

The Thirteenth Dalai Lama passed away in 1933 and two years later came back in a new body; life kept flowing at the same rhythm; nothing could move the Roof of the World till one day of 1950, on the 15th August precisely, when the most incredible earthquake shook Tibet.

In the words of the present Dalai Lama:

"It was like an artillery barrage – which is what we assumed to be the cause of both the tremors and the noise: a test of some sorts being carried out by the Tibetan army...Some people reported seeing a strange red glow in the skies in the direction from which the noise came.... People naturally began to say that this was more than a simple earthquake: it was an omen. Perhaps there is a scientific explanation, but my own feeling is that what has happened is presently beyond science, something truly mysterious⁹.

Suddenly many understood that the time had come.

The Last Testament came back to the mind of all, but it was too late, the dies had been thrown long ago: Tibet would have to go through

⁹ Freedom in Exile, pp 54

the ordeal. Henceforth the only hope for the Tibetans was it would not be too painful and not too long.

The Lama told us: "*We did not think before and then it stroked and we thought: 'Maybe it is not for us, maybe it is only for someone else in the world, it can not be for the Tibetans'. We kept on neglecting our duties*".

It took only a few months for the Tibetans to understand that "it was for them".

The Lama further explained that for the Tibetans, the continuous negligence provoked an accumulation of 'bad or negative karma', which had grown stronger and larger over the years. He considered that in the 30's and 40's, it was like seeds, but over the years, 'karma' kept on accruing and one day of 1950, the boil busted.

Soon after the 1950 earthquake, many in Tibet realised that it was more than a warning. As confirmation of forthcoming dark days, all sorts of celestial glows and lights were spotted everywhere in Tibet. On the political scene, Tibet had no friends left. The British had left India and were only remotely interested by what was happening on the Roof of the World: for London, it was simple, they had no more common borders with Tibet, so why to bother.

Their successor, the Government of India was in two minds, some of the more visionary leaders, like Sardar Patel understood the strategic importance of Tibet for the security of India, but he would soon passed away while Nehru was already started dreaming of a nebulous brotherhood with China.

In 1947, at the time of India's independence, the Tibetans foolishly refused to ratify the Simla Convention with New Delhi, hereby rightly antagonising the Indian government and losing the only possible ally.

For the Lama, it was clear that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama knew in the thirties what was to happen to the Roof of the World. With his

inner vision, he had seen that the fruits of the 'negative karma' had ripened. His Testament was a last attempt to warn his people on what the future had in stock for them.

He knew that it was probably too late, but even this warning was for him, part of the game. He thought that perhaps his Testament could give a future direction to his people.

The Dalai Lama had not only based his predictions on his inner vision, but also on hard facts; he was a great mystic but at the same time a down to earth man.

He had met many people from Mongolia, Russia, England and China. He was fully informed of the world situation; he was aware that the world was in a process of change and foresaw the kind of spinning the world would soon be plunged. There was a marked acceleration in the earth evolution; revolutions were erupting everywhere.

He had sensed that the negative karma was slowly taking over; he decided that he had no other alternative but to give an admonition to his people, especially the Government officials. Ultimately he decided to leave his body to return a couple of years later.

The Lama continued: *"When the karma becomes very strong, when it is ready to burst, at that time it is not very easy to change the consequences. In the 30's already everything seemed already arranged, everything was like confirmed, and the 'black karma' was confirmed. It was like we had a confirmed booking and we were on the train, it is not easy to stop a train".*

Some questions remain

If one supposes that the Tibetan officials had seriously taken the warnings and had acted upon them, could have the consequences been changed? Or was it already too late to stop the train? In others words, could have the black wave been stopped or diverted?

To further complicate the question: a particular chain of consequences do not only depend on one group of persons or factors only (in this case the leaders and people of Tibet), but on hundreds of other forces. In this specific case, one should take into accounts Tibet's neighbours, India and China whose past and future have always been closely linked with the destiny of Tibet. They were also actors in the 'karmic' game of the region.

The Lama felt that the chance was too thin for Tibet to escape its destiny, the dies had been thrown and years after years, the chance to avoid the tragedy had become thinner.

He believed that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama consciously decided to leave his body and come back as a young boy who could eventually be able to dissolve all the bad effects and wash out the negative consequences of the actions of the Tibetan nation.

The Lama went one step further when he told us that it might even be possible that the Dalai Lama made some calculations, "*if he had to live till the end of the 50's, when the negative effects would be at their full strength, then he would be too old to do anything meaningful [for Tibet] and the next 15 or 20 years would be wasted during the childhood and adolescence of his successor*".

It was most probably preferable for him to leave his material sheath in the early 30's and to come again, soon enough to be able as young man to lead his people towards a new freedom.

Many Tibetans believe that such was the motivation of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and as a great yogi, he implemented the decision to go and return to serve his people at the best of his capacity.

It may look surrealist to look at history from that angle but we should not forget that it is from that angle only that the Tibetans are looking at the world and its history.

There is nothing to prove that the western theory of history is superior to the eastern one. History itself proved is that most of the

'modern' theories have proved wrong at least in their practical applications.

To give an example, how do modern Western historians explain that Nepal and Bhutan (or the Fiji Islands) have become independent nations while Tibet, a much older and culturally-sophisticated nation is still in slavery?

Supposing that the Tibetan reading of their history is correct, it would mean that the young Fourteenth Dalai Lama's mission would be to 'wash' away the past 'mistakes' of his countrymen.

If one studies his life since the day he became the temporal leader of Tibet in November 1950 it is clear that he did this only. He took Dharma of his nation, locked in the dark rooms of Himalayan monasteries and spread it the world over, in a way understandable to the modern man. Is it not ironical that the leader of a nation which was even refusing to open letters from 'foreigners' is today one of the most respected figure amongst the same 'foreigners'. His mission began in 1950 at the age of 15 he became the head of a State in crisis. He did not find much time to enjoy his teen-age life, but he was always aware that this was part of his destiny. In the mid-fifties, he fully engaged himself in political activities and from this time never stopped to dutifully serve his country and his people. When we asked the present Dalai Lama in a recent interview, which is for the most important, the Tibetan cause or your spiritual message, he replied *"I have three commitments: promotion of human values, promotion of religious harmony and promotion of awareness of Tibetan cause."*

And when asked him if there was *an order in these commitments*, he said: "Yes, in this order. First, as a human being, promotion of human values is my first priority, this covers 6 billions of human beings. Then second, I am a Buddhist, and as a Buddhist I want to

promote religious harmony: there are perhaps half of these 6 billions who are religious believers.

The third one is about Tibet. "

Out of three commitments, no one and two are mainly on volunteer basis. Till my death I committed myself o these causes. Regarding the third one, in a way it no so volunteer, it is due to past history and the Dalai Lama institution and particularly because I have the name of the Dalai Lama who played a role in past history, I am bound to this commitment and this responsibility."

Is it not the continuation of the work of the Thirteen for the entire humanity?

Another question should be raised: is what happened to Tibet not disproportionate, compared to the presumed negative actions committed?

The Tibetans like any other human beings have committed many wrongs, but elsewhere in the world the French, the British, the Americans or the Chinese have also committed (and are committing) wrong actions.

Was not Hiroshima or Nagasaki a bad karmic action for the Americans, still today the conscience keeper of the world? Why are the consequences so dramatic in the case of Tibet? Even if one admits that there were many unresolved problems and wrong doings in old Tibet, but why to pay such a high price?

The Tibetan (and Indian) Buddhists could argue that the karma of the British is not light either; their neighbours and colonies have suffered their own share of the imperialist policies of the Crown ¹⁰. Why can't we see the ripening of the centuries of most negative karma?

¹⁰ The Partition of India by Lord Mountbatten is one of the worse 'unpunished' crime against humanity.

Even for learned lamas it is not easy to find an answer to this question.

It is true that the supposed wrong actions of Tibet seems mild compared to many, Tibet had never had such imperialist tendencies; Tibet never attacked its neighbours; Tibet had its own internal conflicts and disunity (especially in the first decades of the 20th century) but was it so serious to be the root of such difficulties and obstacles?

David Frawley in his explanation of the Karma makes an interesting remark:

We also see that anyone who chooses the spiritual life is going against the outer order of society. Hence it is usual for a spiritual aspirant to receive criticism or undergo hardship from the outer world. According to the ancient myths all the Gods abandon us so that we can discover ourselves, only we ourselves can destroy the dragon of our own ignorance. Oppression or hardship in life may not be an indication of bad karma but the shadow of the good grace of the spiritual path in a world that is contrary to it. Moreover, the spiritual life often involves a quickening of our karma, an attempt to work it out at a faster rate. For this reason we may experience more negative karma as we move along the path. This again is no indication of necessary evil in our nature but part of a process of purification.

Was it because the Tibetans were spiritually more advanced than their neighbours that they could 'take' more on their shoulders? It is not to us to answer this question here; however at a spiritual point of view, it has again and again been said that the difficulties are always given in function of the capacity of the disciple. In Tibet there is a well-known individual case, Milarepa who was given the most incredible ordeals by his guru, Marpa, before to be authorised to receive the final initiation. He had to suffer much

physical hardship to dissolve the remnants of his ego and be purified enough from his past wrong actions to take the next step in his spiritual *sadhana*.

Like any Guru would give different degrees of initiation to different disciples and this according to their previous training and capacity to learn from the experiences, the gods may have seen that Tibet was very advanced spiritually (for centuries the Tibetans lamas had been the Guru of China), could take some of their sins.

At the Lama's point of view, it is the only plausible (and logic) answer; the Tibetans due to their past inner realisation and *sadhana* could "take it". They could "swallow" or 'digest" a higher dose of negative consequences than any other nations, like the Hindu god Shiva swallow the poison of the universe.

More practically, Tibet has today become the symbol of world injustice in international politics. If a small nation's rich culture can be destroyed in front of the closed eyes of the world's consciousness, what is left of the political ethics behind which the United Nations and other world bodies are hiding?

The leaders of the powerful nation of the planet continue with their beautiful profession of faith; they speak of a just world, but money remains the only god (or asura) left in an everyday more materialistic society. Was Tibet destined to play this role? Was the last fifty year's ordeal, only a preparation for this role?

If the modern story of Tibet is seen from the spiritual point of view, it is obvious that Tibet was able to 'take' more than many other nations.

The Lama made another interesting point: that Tibet had had a long, sometimes difficult and sometimes smoother relations with India and

China. Due to this old connection, the karma of Tibet ripened when new important developments occurred in these nations ¹¹.

We were told that: *“when the ripening of karma had to happened, it can happened in any kind of form. But perhaps karma is clever, karma knows everything. It knew that Tibet had a long affair with China, so the ripening of the karma came from that direction and the Tibetans did not have much to say in the matter”*.

The karmic history of Tibet can be seen from one more angle. As believers of Mahayana Buddhism, many in Tibet had taken the Boddhisattvas vows.

Could it be that as a compassionate action, some beings took on their shoulders the karmic consequences of the China’s past actions to purify and cleanse them?

In the Indian tradition, there innumerable stories of gurus taking the sins of their disciples on their body. There is that marvellous story of Sri Ramakrishna, the great Bengali saint who at the end of the last century took on himself the sins of prostitutes that he saw in a street and felt immediately very sick and soon after died of a cancer.

It is said that many great lamas, some very revered yogis passed away in prison after serving jail sentence for 10 or 20 years. While in prison they continuous prayed to lighten the karmic consequences of all human beings including the Chinese.

According to some Tibetans, not only the Thirteenth Dalai Lama knew what was going to happen to Tibet; many other great lamas were also aware of what was in the offing; and that they could not stop the black wave. They had no alternative to fully accept it and ‘deal’ with it. Consciously, they walked through the ‘long and dark night’.

¹¹ India became independent in 1947 and 2 years later, Mao assumed power in China.

In some way, it seems similar to the different phases of the Bardo described in the old Buddhist scriptures? The Bardo is for the Tibetans the intermediate state between death and the next life. It is the journey of the consciousness through this unknown no man's land. And during this passage the person who is dying has to go through different more or less traumatic experiences. Depending on his past actions and his spiritual advancement, the person can have a smooth and conscious sailing through the Bardo or can have difficult and sometimes terrifying experiences.

At the scale of a nation, the past fifty years of the Tibetan nation seem like this Great Passage; and because some lamas had been conscious from the start that death and devastation was coming down on Tibet, they accepted the fact as a fact of life (and death) and kept their eyes open during the process.

Their concentration and awareness helped all the others to go through and the nation could slowly be reborn. The process is not yet finished but the end of the tunnel is not so far away any more, and the sufferings have tremendously decreased. The end will be come only after the rebirth (or independence) is obtained.

But finally, the shining seems to be coming back.

We were explained that it is because that these beings were aware and had accepted this ordeal (or death) that the nation went through without too much difficulty.

The mind of some of the people who have gone so close to the death, has remained all the long completely free and calm. It is always a fascinating experience to meet some of these beings who have shaken the hand with the death.

We always have in mind the story of Dr Tenzin Choedrak, the Senior Physician of the Dalai Lama who after spent some seventeen years in the concentration camps and having seen more than 90% of his

companions living this world, came out like transfigured. We have personally rarely seen such a good human being.

We could also quote the case of a blind man Jacques Lussian who worked for the French Resistance during the World War II and after having been arrested by the Gestapo and sent to the concentrations camps, had the most powerful spiritual experiences which not only helped him to survive, but also to assist hundreds of other prisoners around him and fortify their faith in the human spirit in front of death.

Prayers and Rituals

Another factor is mentioned by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in his last testament: the importance of prayers.

We have seen that when the Chinese forces invaded Tibet in 1910, the Tibetan leader took refuge in India, and returned to Tibet in 1912 to proclaim the Independence of Tibet.

He wrote in his Testament: *"As a result of our meritorious Karma, and the numerous prayers and services that were conducted in Tibet, internal strife took place in China. It was no problem therefore to completely drive out the Chinese from Tibet."*

This shows the importance given by the Tibetans to the power of prayers and rituals. Though the performances of *pujas* could had in certain cases, a great role to play, however the Tibetans learned in Chamdo in 1950, that they could not fully depend on it.

In his wisdom, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama saw that a modern army was as useful as prayers (if not more) to repel the enemy.

The following anecdote was told by Robert Ford who was the British radio operator in Chamdo at the time of the Chinese invasion.

Shortly after the news that the Chinese had began invading Tibet

and had crossed the Upper Yangtse¹², the monastery and the people of Chamdo decided of intensifying their prayers and rituals to chase the enemy from the Roof of the World. Ford recalled:

The Procession came down from the monastery, about one hundred monks, including the abbot. ...The procession reached the bottom of the hill. Some of the monks were burning incense, and other carried fearsome-looking images made of coloured butter. There were the devils.... There was a brief silence as the abbot invoked the gods, and then the bonfire was lightened: more chanting, more music, more gunfire ...with everyone shouting and yelling at the tops of their voices, as the images were thrown on the burning wood.

The whole town believed in it and participated in the incense burning and other ceremonies. They all thought that it would be enough to send back the troops of Mao, but unfortunately, the troops of the 2nd Field Army of Lui Boshen were more powerful than the exorcising rituals.

Nevertheless, prayers certainly helped the Tibetans during the following years of suffering; they may have not stopped the invasion itself or reverted the 'karmic' effects, but they kept alive the extraordinary faith of the Tibetan people. That confidence in the Three Jewels, in the Dalai Lama and in the Future of Tibet has been over the years a very surprising factor for the Chinese (though they could not openly admit it).

To give an example in 1980, when the Tibet First Fact Finding Delegation headed by Juchen Thubten Namgyal went to Tibet, the Chinese officials told the Tibetan people: *"The representatives of the Dalai Lama are coming, do not throw stones, don't spit on them.*

¹² A few days walk from Chamdo.

Though they have not been re-educated, do not misbehave with them"

The Chinese seriously believed that after 20 years of occupation, the Tibetan people had been enough "re-educated" (or brainwashed); they really feared that the Tibetans could attack the Dalai Lama Representatives.

When the 1959 revolt occurred, the Tibetans had already gone through nine years of slow indoctrination. Following terrible repression of 1959, tens of thousands were killed; then the Tibetans went through the madness of the Great Leap Forward and the inhuman Great Cultural Revolution, and the back of the Tibetan nation was still not broken; their faith was intact.

But in 1980, the Chinese thought that the Tibetans were finally 'liberated'. When the delegates visited Tibet: they could not believe what they saw: everyone prostrated in front of the cars¹³ or wanted to tear the shubas of the delegates. For the Communist regime, it was so flabbergasting, it was beyond any official's comprehension. Religion was a poison Mao had told the Dalai Lama in 1954, but in this case it had been for the Tibetans a powerful antidote to the Maoist indoctrination.

Somehow the Chinese seemed to have never understood this particular strength of the Tibetan people. More they tried to annihilate the Tibetan nation, greater its faith became. Even today when the Chinese officials are sent to the monasteries to confiscate the photos of the Dalai Lama, they are helping the undying flame of the Tibetan resistance?

Once a Tibetan told us: *"they can tear the photos on the altars, but they can not tear our love for the Dalai Lama in our hearts"*.

¹³ Some Tibetans were even collecting and eating the dust of the tyres prints of the delegate's vehicles, as a special Prasad (blessed food).

The Chinese have put a lot of their money and energy to eliminate the culture and the religion of Tibet, but after 30 or 40 years of destructive actions, the culture still survive, if not in temples or at least inner most consciousness of each Tibetans.

It seems very difficult, not to say impossible for the Chinese leadership¹⁴ to understand this indestructible faith the Tibetans have in the human spirit.

At a larger level, the struggle of the Tibetan people for survival seems more a struggle between two ideologies: materialism and spiritualism. Communist China representing the forces of materialism and Tibet, the spiritual aspect.

A new Mahabharata in Asia?

We have today the impression of a race: can spirituality survive in an environment of constant infiltration by the forces of business, corruption and lust for material things?

Can the new generation of Tibetans who has never known the suffering of the 50's or the 60's, find an inner strength to survive the materialistic deluge from China? It is not an easy proposition, for example it was sometime ago reported that the Chinese were opening brothels near the monasteries to 'tempt' the monks. Perhaps, like it happened in the West in the fifties, the younger generation (Chinese and Tibetans) will see through the futility of the material abundance and look for some deeper answer to their problem?

There is some indication that China is changing.

Recently I had a shock: on a French blog I saw the picture of a replica of the Potala Palace on the Tiananmen Square. What was the Dalai Lamas' palace doing in front of the Great Hall of the People?

¹⁴ Hua Yobang, the former Secretary General of the Party was perhaps a rare exception.

Wanting to display some buildings of China on the occasion of the People's Republic Day, the Beijing authorities had selected the Potala. This exhibit is indeed symptomatic of the new craze for the Roof of the World in China.

It immediately brought to mind an interview in 2001 with the Dalai Lama. I had asked him whether he thought that lakhs of Chinese would come to his teachings if one day he was to go to China. He surprised me by answering that he had always the "desire or vision" to perform the Kalachakra Initiation on Tiananmen.

Fifty years earlier, during a visit to China, the Tibetan leader often received an evening visit of Mao Zedong at his guest house. Mao always spoke of Tibet's backwardness. The Dalai Lama agreed with the need for reforms, but when Mao told him, "Religion is poison", he "felt a violent burning sensation all over my face and I was suddenly very afraid"; he realized that Mao was "the destroyer of the Dharma".

This idea that Tibet was a barbaric and ignorant nation has not always been held in China; for several centuries, the Tibetan Lamas were the State gurus of the Yuan and Manchu Emperors. But with the advent of Communist rule, things changed drastically and the contempt for the 'remote borders provinces' increased over the years.

One should mention one exception: Hu Yaobang. When the Chinese Chairman visited Tibet in 1980, he was so disgusted by the abject poverty of Tibetans that he called a meeting of top functionaries and asked them if *"all the financial assistance earmarked for Tibet had been thrown into the Yarlung river [Brahmaputra]"*.

But Hu Yaobang was himself overthrown and the old perception persisted. In the early eighties, a few Chinese dissidents began 'opening' up to Tibet. The book of one of them, Ma Jian was recently published in English and reviewed by *The Guardian*: "Without the

Tibetan context in which Stick Out Your Tongue was written [in 1985], the stories can seem stark, even brutal. ...For Tibetans, Han Chinese are the occupiers of their land and destroyers of their culture. ...For those Han Chinese who find Beijing's propaganda less appealing, Tibet can seem like the romantic locus of a profound spirituality and a place of exhilarating, if dangerous, beauty." The book was banned in 1987 because for the authorities, *"Ma Jian fails to depict the great strides the Tibetan people have made in building a united, prosperous and civilised socialist Tibet"*.

In the 1980s, it became fashionable for a few years for Chinese artists and writers to visit Tibet. It was a way to demonstrate their own nonconformity, and perhaps also that there was something more in life than the 'to be rich is glorious' slogan trumpeted by Deng Xiaoping after Mao's death. The 'capitalist roaders' as the Great Helmsman would have called them, were now at the helm of affairs and the great economic big-bang had begun. Probably as a reaction to the diehard materialism, 'spiritualism' became 'cool' for the few who dared to not ride the new economic wave. But in the official circles, the perception of 'backward' Tibet remained.

The present Chinese President Hu Jintao who was posted as Party Chief in Lhasa at the end of the 80's, was then known in Beijing as 'Hu the Malingerer'. He hated Tibet's harsh conditions and would always manage to spend several months in Beijing where he would have to check into a hospital. There was a joke in Party circles: "If you want to find Hu, go to Beijing Hospital."

But amongst ordinary people, the new wave continued to grow. One pole of spirituality was the Serthar Buddhist Institute in Kantse prefecture (Sichuan province). With around 7000 permanent residents at the beginning of the 90's, it was the largest monastery in Eastern Tibet. Unfortunately, in the mid-90's Beijing ordered a crackdown and most of the monastic buildings were razed to the

ground. The interesting part of the story is that the demolition was triggered by the presence of more than 1000 Chinese monks. The regime in Beijing simply did not know how to deal with this new phenomenon. Despite its sad end, Serthar's case shows that something deeper was moving in the Middle Kingdom.

Today the Tibet phenomenon is taking new shapes and expressions.

Take the Potala in Lhasa. Tourism has grown so much that the Palace is threatened by the large number of Chinese visitors.

Authorities had to increase the entrance fee for Chinese tourists to 100 Yuans (14\$) and the number has to be restricted to 2,300 people a day: 'an absolute ceiling' according to the authorities who are quick to explain *"It's just a museum - a tourist attraction. It is an abandoned home containing Dalai Lama's relics. No religious activity takes place."*

But for the tourists reaching Lhasa by train it is a must.

Stephanie Hoo of *Associated Press* who visited Tibet last year, wrote:

"There's a new type of pilgrim spinning the prayer wheels at Tibet's holiest sites. Along with the Tibetans who prostrate themselves before the vacant throne of their exiled leader, the Dalai Lama, swarms of Chinese tourists rub crisp Chinese money on their foreheads and then cram the bills into collection boxes."

A few weeks back, the *South China Morning Post* published an eye-opener piece: *"Tibet fever, which started spreading throughout the west more than a decade ago, is finally catching on across the mainland, where people are embracing just about everything Tibetan."*

The Post correspondent adds: *"Walk anywhere in Beijing and you will be confronted with the phenomenon."*

Many shops are stocked with Tibetan thangkas, statues, clothing, jewellery and even battery-operated prayer wheels.

Today in Beijing, you can even find Lhasa Beer, yak butter (salted) tea, chang (barley beer) or dried yak beef; and of course the latest DVDs on Tibetan themes are on sale.

Zhu Zheqin, better known as Dadawa in China is one of the most popular Chinese singers; all her albums have a Tibetan inspiration. Yi Zhi, who sold 115,000 copies of his book on Tibet finds that "Tibet is something mysterious, lofty and desirable" and Albert Ng, of *Wild China* travel company told the Post: *"Tibet is the cool place to go. If you've been there, you've got bragging rights."*

Examples could be multiplied. Even reincarnated Lamas are leaving Tibet to teach wealthy patrons and students living in the mainland. This frenzy is double-edged. Many China watchers feel that the Chinese tourists (or worse settlers) will simply swamp Tibet and eradicate what is left of her 2000-year old civilization; others, more optimistic, believe the new trend will transform materialist China and that the Dalai Lama can certainly be a bridge in this process.

Earlier this year during an interview, Lodi Gyari, the Dalai Lama's Special Envoy negotiating with Beijing told me how positive he finds these new changes: *"One of the most decisive factors in the Tibetan issue is this newly found interest for Buddhism in China. Thirty years back, for the Chinese, Tibet was the most backward piece of land of the planet and Tibetans were the most retarded people."* Gyari believes that the times are changing: *"Today in places like Lhasa, you see young and erudite Chinese walking shoulder to shoulder with Tibetans nomads. For them, it is very auspicious; they are on pilgrimage."*

If this trend was to be confirmed, it would certainly a great turning for the karma of Tibet.

Even if the situation starts changing in China, the Communist regime remains not only materialistic, but very often fanatical and fundamentalist. In Buddhist jargon, the actions of the Communist in

the first years after their take over of China, were guided by anger and greed more than by ignorance.

The Cultural Revolution is particular was guided by these forces of anger. Everything coming from the past, called it the "Four Olds" had to be destroyed: "a clean slate" had to be made, said Mao Zedong. The destruction which spread all over China and in Tibet for 10 years, was totally unnecessary from the Buddhist point of view. Even in supposing that the Red Guards or their colleagues in the People Liberation Army had been ideologically right, they were wrong in their motivations and their actions.

The Lama could only repeat, *"but why this violence, where is the necessity. Even at a very practical and material point of view, what could it achieve, what did it achieve?"*

A pure waste, a useless destruction, absolutely unnecessary and this also for the Chinese people. Can wrongs destroy wrongs? The Lama says that it can only create new wrongs.

It would be interesting to have an impartial study to see in what the Chinese revolution in the 40's and then the Cultural Revolution at the end of the 60's have benefited the people by putting together, the positive and the negatives aspects of Mao's policies.

A few days before he passed away in 1989 in mysterious circumstances the Panchen Lama declared:

During the last three decades of communist rule there have been many good things done and many bad things also. These were considered in the Sixth Meeting of the Eleventh National Congress of the Communist Party of China, and were publicized internationally. Owning up to our mistakes will not damage the Party's image; rather it will help build it. Speaking about the former comrades in the Tibet Military Command Centre and the Chengdu Military Command Centre, some comrades told me that they should not have done what they did. This is a healthy

attitude. We frequently say that great achievements were made with your sweat in the liberation and reformation of Tibet and that the people of Tibet will never forget this. This is an honest statement. However, you did make a great deal of mistakes, and these also in Tibet. These too, we will never forget. What I am saying is for the purpose of rectifying these mistakes. If we can do this, we can make progress. I am saying this with the best of intentions. I will tell you a more personal story at this point. The Government of the Kashag spearheaded the rebellion. Those of us at the labrang (monastic institutions) were not party to any agitation. In the beginning, we were told great things about peaceful reforms and policies of fraternal relations. However, when the reforms were undertaken, people belonging to our establishments were subjected to untold suffering. This filled people with disgust and disbelief. Most of the members of the local Tibetan government fled from Tibet. A handful, who stayed back, were praised and appointed to government jobs as shining examples of a progressive element. Our people who stayed back in solidarity with China were subjected to unthinkable suffering. Being in Lhasa, as I was at that time, I did not suffer so much. But all my family members were subjected to thamzing (public struggle sessions).

In this context it is interesting to see what the Dalai Lama thinks of Mao Zedong, the Great Helmsman of Modern China. During an interview we asked the Dalai Lama: "*In your first book [My Land and my People], you seemed to admire Mao, while in the second all appreciative remarks have been removed. Did you change your mind on Mao?*" he just laughed. Later he added: "When the first book (was published) the Cultural Revolution was yet not started and what the Gang of Four (especially Ching Qing, Mao's wife) did had not yet happened.

Although after the 'Hundred Flowers movement' [in 1957-58] and after Peng Duhuai was dismissed [in 1959], [it is true that] I changed my mind. At that time, I was still in Tibet, during the 'Hundred Flowers' many people were removed, outrooted, I had some kind of doubts, of wondering, some kind of reservation. In fact I had some kind of surprise (at these happenings). Then in 1959, Peng Duhuai, my 'favorite' Chinese leaders, the Defense Minister got dismissed, [it was] after the "Great Leap Forward". I [began] to have some doubt (about Mao Zedong), some doubt, some doubt, but still I had quite a high percentage of respect. But after the Cultural Revolution and after his wife became something like the Empress, then it seemed [to me] very strange. But I still had some kind of admiration or recognition [for what he was]. He was a leader, no doubt, and a great revolutionary, no doubt [about it]."

We pointed out to the Dalai Lama that Mao considered the atomic bomb as a 'paper tiger'. In a speech in Moscow in 1957, Mao had said that he was willing to lose 300 millions people - half of China population, the country would suffer no great loss. We could produce more people."

Earlier in 1954, he had said something similar to Jawaharlal Nehru when the Indian Prime Minister visited Beijing.

The Dalai Lama made an illuminating remark: "Such attitude should be considered as very stubborn, one sided. Of course, when we talk about people Hitler, Stalin, Chairman Mao, I think that the Buddhist concept of compassion has no relevance what so ever, it has no place [for them], particularly with people like that. Now, take another field, a new field, if you make a comparison [between different] categories of dictators.

You could consider him as a sort of Destroyer, but then there little difference between Chairman Mao or people like Fidel Castro, or also Che Guevara. These people once they get power, somehow the

power itself spoiled them. Some negatives things happened, but at the beginning these people were really revolutionaries and they were really determined to serve their people and do something for their people. Their hatred was towards the exploiters and the inequalities. So, these people did something good unlike [people like] Idi Amin. These [type] of dictators have no good sides, there is nothing to their credit.

When he asked he felt that like in the Indian tradition Mao represented some type of asuric forces, the Dalai Lama admitted that historically the Chairman was the destroyer of the Buddha Dharma, but he added "By Asura you mean a sort of devil? Isn't it?" And laughing away: "You want to know if he has some sorts of horns?" His conclusions were that even in Mao, everything was not bad: "Of course he really changed China; even in an external way. He was able to bring about a change, it happened. It is a fact that Mao has given a shake to China, but whether it had a good or a bad effect, it is difficult to say."

But what good did the Revolution bring to the Chinese and the Tibetan people? Was the ten-year long campaign of the total destruction of monuments, temples, historical houses and art objects necessary?

The Tibetan Lama gave his views: "*There is something I do not understand, that need of destruction. Because this ancient culture, like in every country, the ancient culture in China is priceless, it is precious, it is priceless, now they can not replace it. I can not understand how human beings can become completely blind. The Chinese used to tell us, Tibetans: "you have a blind faith", but actually they really have a blind faith.*

Many feel that China is changing and though it can not yet be expressed freely, somewhere there is a deep regret at what has happened and what was done to China (by the Chinese) during the

past 20 or 30 years. Twenty years means one generation, and during one generation the Chinese leaders ordered the destruction of their own ancient culture; not only of their own culture, but also the culture of Inner Mongolia, Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang) and Tibet was eradicated.

The unfortunate part of the story is that today a new phenomenon has emerged in China and South East Asia, a new God has taken over after the death of Mao: money.

Deng Xiaoping, the man who in the fifties had said that it did not matter if "a cat was black or white as long as he could catch mice", once again made a "clean slate" after his return to power in 1978. The cat would remain red but the mouse had a new name "money". The Marxists never believed in the power of mantras, but today China repeats ceaselessly "money, money, money". And not only the People's Republic of China but also all the countries in South East Asia where Chinese population had established, be it Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, or Thailand have started repeating 'money, money, money'. One could add India on the list. No wonder that these nations feel so attracted (in a hate and love game) by the United States.

It seems that out of the destruction of the Cultural Revolution, out of the "clean slate" of Mao, the only new energy, which could spring up was the energy to accumulate "money". The first major declaration of Deng Xiaoping was that "to become rich is glorious"; it was the beginning of what would later be called "socialism with Chinese characteristics".

But every action has a reaction, and though it is doubtful that a new Mao reincarnates soon in China to clean the slate once again, what is today slowly happening is a revival of the old spiritual traditions in China.

At this point of view, the visit of the Dalai Lama in Taiwan in 1997, was very interesting. It appeared like the revival of a long relation between China and Tibet. Was it a new beginning for the Choe-Yon or Priest Patron relationship between China and Tibet?

One evening of March 1997, CNN and BBC beamed images of a stadium in Taiwan with some 80000 Chinese Buddhist devotees religiously listening in a pin-drop silence to a sermon of the Dalai Lama. It was a most extraordinary sight: this monk was, according to the Communist propaganda supposed to hate the Chinese race for what has happened in Tibet during the past forty years. The monk was speaking of love and compassion to his Chinese brothers and sisters who were drinking his words like pure Amrita

Many felt that the same scene could happen one day in a not too distant future on Tiananmen square.

Three years earlier he had told us:

I feel that Tibetan culture with its unique heritage - born of the effort of many human beings of good spirit, of its contacts with Chinese, Indian, Nepalese and Persian culture, and due to its natural environment - has developed some kind of energy which is useful, and very helpful, towards cultivating peace of mind and a joyful life. I feel that there is a potential for Tibet to help humanity, and particularly our Eastern neighbour, where millions of young Chinese have lost their spiritual values.

In this way I feel very strongly that Tibetan culture will have a future role to play in humanity¹⁵.

A similar movement occurred in the West at the end of the sixties, when one generation born after the World War II, did not accept the values of their parents anymore and refused to believe that money

¹⁵ The Dalai Lama in Auroville, 1994.

was running the world; many at that time turned towards an inner research.

The student movement in Europe in 1968 was basically a spiritual revival rejecting certain values of the society based on materialism. It was unfortunately recuperated by the leftist parties or trade unions which killed the spirit of this revolution in bringing it down to that level of raise of salaries, extra social covers or struggle of different classes.

A similar movement is pointing in Asia.

In essence and practically the movement is always similar, first the masses have to gain a minimum of material wealth. Swami Vivekananda had once said that it is useless to speak spirituality to someone with an empty stomach. It is only once the stomach are full and that a certain material level of well being is being reached that the mind can be turned inward, and a new thirst for spiritual food can arise.

Today the red cat is still catching green notes, but soon the cat will be wanting something that 'socialism with Chinese characteristic' can not bring, something which could satisfy the human spirit of millions of young Chinese.

This day will come and perhaps that day the Tibetan nation will have completed the full circle of death and life, it will perhaps be the beginning of a new life of the Roof of the World. There may be no regrets; the long and painful journey would have found its true meaning, reached his destined goal.

In the meantime, during the past decades, the Chinese nation itself has accumulated of negative karma. Will this have consequences? It is not easy to say, but it seems inescapable. But ultimately, the most important point is not of escaping or not the consequences of your actions, but to learn from them in order to be sure that the consequences do not come again.

In this sense, the world could be seen as gigantic classroom where each nations learn to progress through a lot of tears, pain and suffering and sometimes with a few sun rays. More than a moral story, it is perhaps more the capacity to become more aware and understand better one's culture or also the neighbour's which ultimately dictates the karmic consequences.

The case of Amdo Gedun Choepell

The time has come to reflect on what we termed 'the negative karma' of Tibet and what went wrong during the first part of the 20th century in the Land of Snows. We shall first take the example of Amdo Gedun Choepell, one of the most brilliant Tibetans of his time. His life and death symbolised the pre-Chinese invasion Tibet. The nation was divided between the conservatism of Buddhist clergy, the aristocratic land owners, the poor masses and a handful of brilliant and progressive young Tibetan wanting to bring about changes. Often, the latter did not know which shape should the new Tibet of their dreams take or from where to start with the changes in a static society, but they tried.

In the forties, if one compares Tibet to India or China or most of the other Asian countries, one can see that Tibet had some pluses, which eventually turned to its disadvantage.

Tibet was independent and had not been colonised. Though at certain period of her history, Tibet had been under the suzerainty of the Mongols and later the Manchus, the overlordship was always nominal¹⁶; Tibet was in fact completely autonomous; the Tibetans hardly knew the meaning of colonisation or imperialism.

It was a disadvantage in the sense that at a time when Asia was boiling with nationalism fervour, when every one was speaking of freedom struggle and the end of the western dominance, Tibet was enjoying itself. Tibet had nobody to throw out, the Chinese had left Lhasa in 1913 and the few who had come back after the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama were eventually be send back in 1949.

¹⁶ 'A constitutional fiction' in Lord Curzon's words.

Freedom struggle had been the main motor for Asia nationalism and also of Asia's progress. Most of the nations rediscovered their roots and their own culture through this process.

In the case of Tibet, one further 'disadvantage', was that the colonialist powers had been more interested in a *statu-quo* situation and as a result often took the side of the most conservative elements in the society. Although some bold officers posted in Lhasa or in Sikkim¹⁷ saw the need of reforms and changes, they were not supported by their masters in London who were strictly going by the interests of the Empire, which was the *statu quo* (with the support of the Tibetan 'establishment').

The few brilliant individuals with a great love for their country and the will to bring the changes were frustrated by the attitude of both the predominant conservative forces inside Tibet as well as the British policies. London only interests were to maintain a buffer zone between British India and China and eventually open new trade routes.

It is sad to note that the political system was not flexible enough to accept inputs other than the traditional one. Here we certainly have one of the main 'karmic' knots which frustrated the chances of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to bring the necessary changes and save the Land of Snows.

The Life of a Rebel with a Cause

The life of Gedun Choepell should be seen in the above context. Born near Rekong in Amdo province of Eastern Tibet in 1903; Gedun joined a branch of the great Labrang Tashikyil¹⁸ monastery called Yama Tashikyil when he was still very young,.

¹⁷ Like Sir Charles Bell.

¹⁸ The largest monastery of Amdo.

A few years later he entered another monastery called Ditsa. Having been recognised as an incarnate of this monastery, he became known as Alak Ditsa¹⁹. He would later be known as Ditsa Kambo (Ditsa the Thin).

When he joined the main Labrang Tashikyil, he was already famous as a formidable debater and a great scholar. It is at Labrang that he wrote his famous critics of the Madyamikha, one of the main textbooks of Labrang.

Though still in his twenties, he already was different from the other monks or Geshe and was remarked not only for scholarship but his non-conformist ways of behaving. An example of this was his invention of matchbox boats that he tested in the lake of the monastery. The authorities of the monasteries reprimanded him to indulge in such non religious activities. Later, he fabricated flying objects, which are still exhibited in the main hall of the Monastery. In Labrang, he left the image of a sort of Tibetan Leonardo²⁰, mastering not only the Buddhist philosophy but also arts, painting, history and whatever subject he touched.

The legend of Gedun Choepell was born. Later he went to Drepung monastery where he studied under the famous Geshe, Sherab Gyaltsu²¹.

Still in his twenties, he left for India and started the life of a wandering monk. For the next twelve years he visited Aryabhumi, the sacred Land of the Buddha as India was known by the Tibetans. He travelled as far as Kashmir and the North-western Frontiers (now Pakistan) as well as South India and Sri Lanka. Wherever he went he

¹⁹ In Eastern Tibet 'Alak' is corresponding to 'Rinpoche' or 'Precious'. It is the title used by reincarnated Lamas.

²⁰ Though nobody knew Leonardo in Labrang.

²¹ Sherab Gyaltsu later left his name in the Tibetan history when in 1949 he allowed the Chinese invaders to use his name to justify the "liberation" of Tibet.

studied the people, he learned their language and wrote about their history.

In Northern India, he looked for the remnants of the Kingdom of Oddiyana (Urgyen) from where Guru Padmasambhava is supposed to have come before journeying to Tibet to convert its inhabitants to the Tantrayana form of Buddhism.

In Sri Lanka, he studied Pali and the Southern Buddhist tradition and wrote about the Vinaya rules practised by the Theravedin monks. At that time he was wearing the orange robe of the Hinayanist monk. He took the opportunity of his pilgrimages and travels to draw the first Tibetan maps of Buddhist pilgrimages in India and he published a book which is still in use today by Tibetan pilgrims. His fantastic memory, his sense of history and his curiosity took him to several holy places of India in particular Varanasi and Patna where he began studying Sanskrit, Hindi and English.

He was even offered a teaching post by Rabindranath Tagore at Shantiniketan, but he loved too much to be on the roads and he refused.

Writing non-stop his political views and the outcome of his historical researches, he never stopped to rest or establish himself as a scholar. He continued to live, criss-cross India, most of the time in complete denouement.

He became friend with the greatest scholars and pandits of his time like Nicholas Roerich, Rahula Sankrityayana; he lived for a few years in Kalimpong where he met other 'exiled' revolutionaries of Tibet like Ragpa Pandatshang, Baba Phuntsok Wangyal or Kumphela.

In 1938, he went to Tibet with Rahula Sankrityayana and his team in search of lost Sanskrit manuscripts. His scholarship was an introduction for the Indian Pandits who wanted to collect these old texts. For centuries, they were no more available in India and were said to have been preserved in the Tibetan monasteries for over a

thousand years. The expedition was quite successful and many of their discoveries are now kept in the Bihar Museum where, after his return to India, Gedun Choepell worked for some time to index the manuscript.

The writings of Gedun Choepell covered so many diverse subjects such as some chapters of the Bhagavad Gita, the Dhammapada (translated from Pali to Tibetan in Sri Lanka and published in Kulu), a translation of Shakuntala of Kalidasa, some hymns of the Rig Veda, a complete translation of the Ramayana and even the Kamasutra. But Choepell's master piece was '*The White Annals*' a totally new reinterpretation of the history of Tibet.

At a time when sectarianism was spreading in Tibet and when the different sects of Tibetan Buddhism were struggling to prove their superiority, his mind was broad enough to study (and translate) the ancient sacred texts of India. He even read the Bible and the Koran²².

All his writings, notes, paintings, sketches were kept in a black box which was always travelling with him; it is very unfortunate that after his return to Lhasa the famous black box containing the most illuminating writings of modern Tibet mysteriously disappear during his trial in Lhasa and after his release, the treasures contained in the box could never be traced.

Perhaps, the disappearance of the black box is the symbol of an old Tibet which could not understand radically new ideas and was not ready to accept reforms; it is also the symbol of Gedun Choepell's great love for the human spirit and for India.

The true passion of Gedun Choepell was the history of Tibet and his remarkable work opened the way to a new interpretation of the prehistoric history of Tibet. In the course of his study he was able to

²² It seems that he even read "My Kampf" of Adolf Hitler.

consult the manuscripts of Denhuang and decipher the historic pillars in Lhasa on which the history of the relations of Tibet and China had been written.

Another of his revolutionary research concerns the Tibetan scripts brought by Thommi Sambhota in the 7th Century AD. He could trace their origin to a Gupta script of ancient India.

Many people played an important role in his life. One of them was a missionary from Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh) known as Babu Kunu Tharchin who had started in Kalimpong, the first Tibetan language newspaper called the Melong²³.

We know about Gedun Choepell's view thanks to some articles published in the Melong, it mainly deals with his travels in Tibet and the history of the Tibetan scripts. Apart from these articles, only a few of his letters still exist; this explains why very little is known about his peregrination in their Indian subcontinent.

When in 1945, he decided, against the advice of his friends, to return to Tibet to try to bring out changes in the old society; his decision marked the beginning of troubles for him. Lhasa was not ready to welcome such a brilliant and controversial figure.

While in Kalimpong, he had been met some of the 'exiled' Tibetan revolutionaries in particular Rigpa Pandatshang, the leader of a new 'Improvement Party'²⁴.

Another of his acquaintances was Baba Phuntsok Wangyal who was freely expressing his communist leanings and later joined Mao

²³ The Mirror.

²⁴ Rigpa, one the Pandatshang brothers was himself a great scholar but because of his connections with the KMT government in Nanjing, he would soon be declared persona non grata and expelled from India.

Zedong in Yunnan and eventually became the first Tibetan to join the Communist party. Later he worked as Mao's Tibetan translator²⁵. Lhasa's agents in Kalimpong and the British intelligence knew about Gedun's 'revolutionary' contacts. As he entered Tibet, he became immediately suspect to the eyes of the Tibetan Government (particularly some members of the aristocracy) and the British mission.

Gedun Choepell had left Kalimpong disguised as a pilgrim and instead of taking the normal way via Chumbi Valley, he decided to go through the North East of India and visit Tawang and the Land of Mon. He travelled through Eastern Bhutan to finally reach Tawang where he was probably keen to visit the place where the Sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso was born. Gedun had already shown a lot of interest for this unusual Dalai Lama and in particular for his secret life in Amdo and Mongolia after his presumed death in the hand of the Mongols. Gedun was also sharing many of the young 6th Dalai Lama's loves: poetry, wine and women.

Tawang was a strategic area²⁶ which had been attached to India after the Simla Conference between the British and Tibetan representatives. The Tibetan Government had never fully dropped the idea to get one day the Land of Mon back while the British were very sensitive about any outside visitors in the area. Apart from the 6th Dalai Lama, another interest of Gedun in this area was the existence of a Chorten Karpo. This Great Stupa (chorten) was supposed to have marked the borders of Tibet at the time of the Tibetan empire in the 7th and 8th century.

Gedun was thinking that like the writings on the pillars in Lhasa that he had deciphered while he still was in Tibet, some of these chortens

²⁵ He was himself demoted by Mao in 1957 and kept in jail for nearly twenty years. He is still alive.

²⁶ See *'The Fate of Tibet'* by the author.

had bi-lingual inscriptions which could bring some light on the ancient history of Tibet. Nothing is known of his stay in Tawang but he is said to have spent a few weeks in Tsona where he spent his time writing.

Did he found out anything interesting for his history of Tibet in Mon; he may have seen the famous Choksar Chorten which perhaps was the Chorten Karpo of the ancient legend²⁷.

This place would become famous many years later when the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, fleeing the Chinese entered India at this particular place. Three years after the Dalai Lama's passage, the Chinese Liberation Army invaded India through the same path. During his stay in Mon, Gedun Choepell drew a detailed map of the area which in the following months created a lot of difficulties for him and added to the charges against him.

It seems that this map had been requested by Ragpa and was later on passed to the Kuomintang (without the knowledge on Gedun). It is ironic that till today there is no proper map of this part of the Indian territory²⁸.

During his journey back to Tibet, Gedun Choepell wrote a description of the land and people of Southern Tibet, unfortunately like many other of his writings, it was lost or destroyed.

He reached Lhasa with a thorn Chuba and his only belonging was an old black trunk, the famous box containing all his written treasures. As soon as he landed in the Tibetan capital, one of his few sincere disciples described the scene: *"many scholars and many idiots,*

²⁷ When we visited the area in 1996, the Chorten had recently been restored but the local population who participated to the Kar Seva had very little knowledge about the ancient history of the place.

²⁸ We were surprised at the time of our visit to find that even the senior civilians officers do not have a proper maps of the district; the only correct maps are in the exclusive possession of the army authorities

several high government officials, both lay and monk officials were very moved by his presence and fought to have the honour to invite him”

It was the “beginning of his fall” added the disciple. But soon, the same people who were so keen to invite him, pretended not to know him when he began getting into trouble.

It is still not clear how began the events which lead to his arrest, but one fact seems proved: it was most probably linked with his relations with the Pandatsangs who had started the Revolutionary Improvement Party in Kalimpong on the lines of Sun Yatsen’s party in China. It appears that Pandatshang while in India had kept his connections (and his passport) with the Chinese Nationalist government.

The main problem was that in the late forties, the Tibetan system was not able to allow or assimilate anyone having different views and ideas than the accepted ones. In the case of Gedun, what was even more irritating for the Government and especially for the two main repository of the power (the aristocracy and the monks) was that Gedun was more brilliant than any of them and had a greater scholarly knowledge of the religion and history of Tibet

From his religious education he got the scholarship which could equate the greatest. Once he said of his guru Geshe Sherab Gystso of Drepung, one of the greatest scholar of Tibet would had been one of the debate partners of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama: *“All what he knows, I know it, all what I do not know it, he does not know it”*.

The old Geshe was always calling Gedun by the name of *Nyonpa* (the Mad One)²⁹. Witnesses said that when the two were together, they always started fighting and their disputes (and debates) had become famous in Drepung.

²⁹ Very often in Tibet, *Nyonpa* is used for Lamas who are no more bound by common wisdom or behaviour.

It is worth mentioning an anecdote, when a few years later the old Geshe was leaving for China, Gedun went to Calcutta to meet him for a last time. They went into a terrible argument: was the earth was round or not? Basing his argument on the Buddhist tradition that he was perfectly mastering, the Geshe argued that the earth was flat while his disciple demonstrated that it was round. The teacher got so upset by the arrogance of his disciple that he concluded that *"if it is round, I will flattened it"*. Gedun Choepell is supposed to have retorted *"without speaking of a man, not even a dog will visit you in China, if you speak like that."*

It marked the end of the relations between an extraordinary disciple and a famous teacher.

Perhaps to take revenge, Gedun Choepell wrote an article in the *Melong* reporting that in Europe centuries ago people had been burned alive for pretending that earth was round, but now the whole world had accepted that the earth is round: *"because of the great and small measurements, horizontal and vertical have been analysed and confirmed it. Nobody amongst the scholars of the big countries has the slightest doubt on this matter."* He even said that Buddhists in Singala (Sri Lanka), Burma, Siam, Japan and China were accepting the rotundity of the earth, only his guru obstinately does not accept it.

This fight to prove that the earth is round is undoubtedly the symbol of the old secluded Tibet against new discoveries of the outside world.

Gedun Choepell tried to break the circle of obscurantist traditions, but failed.

Soon after his return to Tibet, he was sent to jail and his so-called friends and well wishers at the time of his arrival did not know him anymore. He eventually spent 2 years in prison in the Shol area at the bottom of the Potala. Though he was whipped once, he greatest

suffering came from the fact that he could not write, all his books and notes had been confiscated and he was not provided with any paper. From time to time, he managed to write a poem on a packet of cigarettes and send it to one of the very few faithful disciples. These poems were religiously kept but unfortunately do not exist anymore.

While in prison, he must have heard of India's independence and also informed about the Communists taking control over China. He already had a very clear vision of what the Communists would bring to Tibet.

One of the main reasons why he was freed by the Tibetan Government (apart from the fact that they no charges had been framed against him) was he was the only one in Tibet, being able to write a correct history of the Land of Snows.

Because in spite of the appearances, Tibet was changing; the Kashag had decided to send a delegation to visit the neighbouring countries especially India and China; the previous Dalai Lama had advised to do so. After the return of these first delegations from India and China, many could finally understand the necessity of a written history of Tibet showing that Tibet as been an independent nation for two thousand years.

But by this time, Gedun was a broken man, he was often repeating that his life was of no use and he started again to drink heavily. His closest disciples considered his drinking and smoking habits as the conscious suicide of a yogi.

This could be discussed but one point is clear is that he was a desperate man, he saw that none of the changes he had foreseen for Tibet would happened in the near future; even the warnings of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had remained unheard by the lamas and the aristocrats.

During the last two years of his life, he lived more like a saddhu; rejecting whatever was presented to him, returning back cloth, food and other presents. Though the Tibetan Government was now ready to provide him with a decent life, he was not interested by any material benefits; he did not want to keep anything for himself. He had become a true *Nyonpa*, a Crazy Saint, famous in Tibet for having realised everything; they were not attached to anything material and often behaved in "crazy" ways.

Till his last days, he loved women. During his days in India, it was rumoured that he had many mistresses but since his return to Tibet, he often denounced the Tibetan men's macho side and declared his high consideration for women. Let us not forget that while still in India, he translated the Kamasutra.

K. Dhondup, the Tibetan scholar who like Gedun passed away young wrote: *"Gedun Chopel's Treatise on Passion makes one thing very clear. He was an ardent lover of women and sex. But he was not a mere pleasure-seeker. His lust for women and sex was equated, if not surpassed, by his love and feeling for women. His heart went out for their plight in the male-dominated society. A transformation which overcame him after reading more than 30 Indian sutras and shastras, including the works of Maheshvara and Vatsyayana, was his utter disgust and anger at the despicable and degrading way women were represented in these works mostly authored by Brahmins. Gedun was always very upset by "the hypocrisy and double-standards of the male attitude", and condemned "the system of pitiless Brahmin" which involved Brahmanic injunctions such as one should not eat from the hands of a widow, the cruel system of widow burning herself on the pyre of the dead husband".*

Gedun Choepell attacked the tradition which under the garb of the religion and the morality, continued to exploit women and put them on the market as a product to be bought for the male sexual

pleasure. He loved women but respected them. Some of his poems were very modern when one thinks that they were written in a very orthodox Hindu environment of Benares or Patna in the thirties.

She is the source that gives birth to good lineage

She is the mother who tends when one is sick

She is the poetess who consoles away

The anguish when one is sad

She is the maid who looks after the domestic chores

She is the friend who fills one's life with play and laughter

She is the wife who is united with one by past karma

She is the one who fulfils her role with these six qualities

He also wrote something which could have pleased his sisters of the sixties in the West adepts of the total liberation of women.

One king takes a thousand queens

This is praised as royal deed

If a woman were to marry a hundred husbands

She will be condemned and slandered

As if nothing worse could happen.

Every man has a woman

Every woman a man

Both in their minds desire sexual union

What chance is there for moral and clean behavior?

If natural passions are openly banned

Unnatural passions will grow in secrecy

No laws of religion

No laws of morality

Can suppress the natural passions of mankind.

Like in the case of the Sixth Dalai Lama which was so closed to his heart Gedun Chopell's work and specially *the Treatise on Love* are considered by of his followers as Tantric treatise, highly esoteric in nature.

It is not the place here to study the veracity of this statement, but looking at the life of Gedun Choepell there is no doubt that he may have been a highly initiated lama, though he was also an ordinary man and most of his writings addressed the problem of ordinary men.

*To provide a woman to a man of passion
Is the supreme gift one could give
So it is said in the Kalachakra Tantra
If you do not believe me
Turn to the Practice Chapter of The Kalachakra Tantra
And you will read it there.
The beggar pretends to frown on other's gold
The guest, though hungry,
pretends to spit on the food from mouth
Everyone pretends to dislike sex
But in the mind sex is the only thing everyone likes.*

He was certainly one of the few Tibetans who kept a contact with the outside world. In 1949, he was sending regularly a disciple to the Chinese Mission to get the latest news on the war between the Nationalist and the Communists. He used to say: *"I wonder if Mao will manage to kill enough people to establish communism. He has to do it if he wants to succeed."*

Such prophetic words!

He even encouraged a young disciple to go and study in China, he told him: *"It is good to go to study in India, a friendly country, but it is much more important to go to China. To understand and know your enemy is essential"*

He felt that the Tibetans from Amdo and Kham were much more patriotic than the people of Central Tibet, because they had fought for centuries with the Chinese and knew better about the Chinese for having suffered under their yoke.

In September 1951, when the first Chinese troops entered in Lhasa he was already blind and had only a few months to live, but one friend described to him, the troops passing under his window, he stood at the window and tried to open his eyes with his fingers, he is supposed to have said: *"Good for them, good for them. Everything is accomplished"*

Later, he went around the Bakhor, the parikrma around the Central Cathedral screaming *"The Chinese are here"*.

For Gedun Choepell, Tibet had to fight to regain her past territories. Very often he used to go to the parade ground and watch the training of the Tibetan army. He admired the Great kings of Tibet who had been able to keep Tibet united. Jokingly he once said:

"For more than thousand years, the Dharma has impregnated the spirit of the Tibetans and what can we do now? One ironic solution would be to take the Jowo (the main statue of Buddha in the Central Cathedral of Lhasa) the symbolic nostril of all the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in Tibet and to install in the middle of the Tibetan territory, between Kham, Amdo and Central Tibet, in order to unify Tibet with the religion. Then we would have to fight to destroy religion".

He knew that if the Tibetan society was not able to reform itself from inside, outside forces would come and do it. He knew that the blow would come from China:

The Chinese remember what has happened thousand years ago, and they always think to get rid of the barbarians.

The Kuomintang is projecting to build a road which will penetrate inside Tibet, pretending that way to solve "the Tibetan problem" in a time frame of three hundred years. The Chinese think in long term, and they are our mortal enemy. The Communist Chinese are going to come. Take care of your language, written as well as spoken."

Just one month after the Communists entered Lhasa, he passed away.

Alcohol had destroyed his body. Some of his faithful disciple such Rakra Tethong and Horkhang as well as his last female companion Yudron were at his bedside. Till his last moment he spoke about the future of Tibet and his disciples said that: *" He spoke many prophetic words and announced the fall of the Tibetan Government."*

He is supposed to have said: *"I do not want to die now, I know too much, I can not."* One of his friends said: *" What do you mean, to know too much, apart from you, there were in the past 'the good ones from India' (Buddha and Padmasambhava), and in Tibet TsongKhapa and his two disciples, they once died, why not you"*. He replied: *"Yes, it is true"* and he leaned on the back, entered into Samadhi and passed away.

He had nothing, no money, no properties, even his books and notes had gone.

Though he had wished that his body should be abandoned like a beggar's, his disciples gave him a Tantric "fire dissolution" like the greatest lamas.

He will remain someone who came too early for a nation which was not ready to accept fundamental changes.

*So softly the visage is moving
Its reflection move
So softly the mirror is moving
Its reflection move
This reflection of the phenomena
Moving, instable
When will it vanish for ever*

The Power Struggle Dalai Lama vs. the Panchen Lama

Let us look at another example of what could be termed as the origin of the recent 'black' Karma of Tibet: the 'differences' between the two main Lamas of Tibet.

At an important crossroads of Tibet's history, one of the causes, which weakened the Tibetan State has been the dispute between the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. Though we called the consequences 'karmic', in fact it can more simply be seen as pure historical logic. The differences between the Lamas were fully used by the Chinese (and the British) to their own advantage and to serve their own purpose.

It cannot be totally even ruled out³⁰ that the two great neighbours of Tibet were innocent in the affair.

Though the dispute between the two religious leaders was never 'personal', the Lamas' entourage used their differences of opinion or vision to separate them further and play their own personal games. The split between the Ninth Panchen Lama and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama begun with a trivial matter of taxation, although it involved the important issue of national security and State financing.

In the early years of the 20th century, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had been exiled twice and when he came back for the second time to Tibet in 1913, he declared Tibet's independence. He also decided to give the Tibetan nation the means to defend itself against future invaders or foreign interference.

The basic principle of his policy was to provide a modern education to as many young Tibetans as possible and built a strong army, at least for defensive purpose.

³⁰ Article of the Royal Asiatic Society

After having hesitated on the best military model between the Russian, the Japanese and the British for a few years, the Dalai Lama finally opted for the British. This decision had most probably been influenced by his friendship with Sir Charles Bell and the British leanings of his favourite Tsarong Shape. While in exile in India, he had also gathered quite a good opinion of the British's organisational skills.

These reforms and the attempts to try to build a new and strong Tibet, was not of everybody's taste. From the start the two main lobbies in the old Tibet tried to oppose the changes. Their opposition was not much on ideological grounds, but more on financial accounts and the power derived from it.

The new taxation precipitated the matter; the Lhasa Government and the Tashilhunpo Administration of the Panchen Lama had an opposite view on Tibet's security requirements.

In introducing a strong army, not only the Dalai Lama was bringing a new force in Tibetan politics, but also raising a crucial question: from where will the finances for this new force come.

The existing centres of power (particularly the British and Chinese as also the monasteries) soon realised that the military lobby would be a power to reckon with. Commander-in-Chief Tsarong³¹ with a strong and disciplined force would become too powerful. Things became worse when it became clear that the monasteries would have to pay for the cost of maintaining and training the new regiment from the revenue of their estates. The aristocrats on their side were disturbed by the system of circumscription, which was forcing their offspring to join the ranks of the army.

Another argument used by the ecclesiastic was that Tibet should be a non-violent nation guided by the Buddhist principles of love and

³¹ Tsarong was not noble by birth.

compassion for all other sentient beings, therefore no army was necessary³². But could a non-violent state survive, on his own, in the jungle of 'Great Game'?

Earlier, Tibet had found the convenient system of Cho-yon (Priest-Patron) relationship whereby the Tibetan lamas were providing spiritual guidance against military protection to their patrons. It had worked to a certain extent with the Mongols and the Manchus emperors, but in the changed circumstances and the arrival on the scene of the Nationalists (and later the Communists) in China, the old relationship had lost its relevance.

However in the thirties and forties, a strong lobby in the monasteries was tilting in favour of China and was of the opinion that Tibet's future lied in the East.

The monks, very badly informed about the situation in Asia and the world, dreamt that the new 'emperors' in Beijing or Nanjing would follow the same policy than the Manchus. The Panchen Lama and his entourage more than anybody else were in favour of an alliance with China.

The following years saw amongst some young Tibetans the emergence of the idea to have a more secular administration. They thought that it could be a way to balance the pro-Chinese attitude of the monasteries.

This eventually took different shapes and ways, but the best known amongst these 'reformers' were Kumphela, the Pandatshang brothers, Baba Phuntsok Wangyal, Gedun Choepell or even Lungshar. Each had his own motivations and path, but all of them wanted Tibet to evolve into a modern nation. Unfortunately the system was not ready to accept any internal changes, the establishment was still too

³² Though we will later see that in the dispute between the two Regents in the forties, the monks when they wanted were not so reluctant to use whatever weapons they had.

strong and when, in the early fifties, the reforms could start trickling in, it was already too late, a totalitarian regime had taken over the Land of Snows.

To come back to our story, when the Tibetan Government in Lhasa decided to unilaterally tax the Tashilhunpo of a quarter of the expenses for the army, it was the needed excuse to spark the old dispute between Lhasa and the Tashilhunpo.

The question of taxation brought out several other problems but the main was the administrative autonomy of the provinces as well as the large estates in Tibet.

The Tashilhunpo administration resented Lhasa's decision to impose this new taxation as interference in its internal affairs. The administrative and taxation system in old Tibet were very intricate. In theory, all the land of Tibet belonged to the Dalai Lama who could redistribute them as a favour or reward to people who had served him or the state well.

Usually, the aristocracy or the important lamas were the beneficiaries of the Lama's largesse. The strength and power of the lamas was largely depending of the wealth of their estates or Labrangs. In cases like Tashilhunpo or Sakya, the estates were so large that it was more a State inside the State.

For example the Tashilhunpo Administration considered itself as a local government and resented to be treated by Lhasa like a vassal. It was most probably one of the points (apart from collecting taxes) that the Dalai Lama wanted to make: **there was only one Government of Tibet**, the Ganden Phodang³³ headed by the Kashag with its seat in Lhasa. Internal and taxation policies, the foreign relations and the taxation were the domain of Lhasa only.

³³ The Dalai Lama's administration first set up by the 5th Dalai Lama.

Lhasa made the first demand for extra taxes after the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet in 1912. Lhasa requested the Panchen Lama's administration to pay 27000 Ke of grain for the expenses incurred in chasing the Chinese out of Tibet; the Panchen Lama refused to pay³⁴. The argument of Lhasa was that this tax estimated at a quarter of the over-all expenses for the campaign against the Chinese had some precedent. A similar share had already been paid by the Tashilhunpo during the Gurkha war at the end of the 18th century. Relations between Lhasa and Shigatse further deteriorated when in 1917, Lhasa decided to levy a new tax from the Tashilhunpo's estate in Gyantse district: all the 'serfs' had to pay a *corvée* tax over the request for 100 horses and 300 carrying animals from the Tashilhunpo.

In 1923, a new tax was extended to Tashilhunpo estate itself. In the meantime the Panchen Lama's administration had informed Lhasa that as in any case, they could not afford the tax, they would not pay. The Tibetan government however continued to insist that the taxes had to be paid and after Lhasa had 'verified' through a Commission³⁵ that the Panchen Lama Administration could easily afford the levies, the affair took a political turn. Lhasa was feeling that the Panchen Lama was more and more interested to assert his financial and political separateness from Lhasa; this attitude was not acceptable to the Dalai Lama's government.

What did not help to improve the situation and find a compromise acceptable to both parties, is the fact that the Panchen Lama decided to take the matter to the British Government through the Trade Agent in Gyantse.

The Panchen Lama complained to the British that Lhasa had requested 650000 rupees, 10000 maunds of grain, 2000 boxes of

³⁴ Though he eventually gave a small portion.

³⁵ Appointed by Lhasa.

Chinese bricks of tea and that the Lhasa government had even arrested the Tashilhunpo's representatives in Lhasa for defaulting and had refused to release them till the debt was paid.

His Serenity the Tashi Lama states that he is unable to meet the demands made upon him and proposes to submit a representation to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, ...if his request is not granted, His Serenity wishes to know whether the Government of India will mediate between himself and His Holiness the Dalai Lama as he states that his only hope is the assistance of the Government of India."

The fact that the Panchen Lama first took the dispute to the British before directly appealing to the Dalai Lama worsened the situation. The Panchen Lama then decided to leave Tibet; after a first aborted attempt to escape, he finally managed to leave for Mongolia. Before his escape, he left instructions with his administration as how to deal with the Lhasa Government. He made a point to state that he had personally nothing against the Dalai Lama: *"With regard to the trouble of the Tashilhunpo Government and their subjects, I have submitted representations to His Holiness the Dalai Lama on several occasions, but my requests have not been granted. At the same time His Holiness has always shown me kindness."*

He stated that it was only officers in the entourage of the Dalai Lama, the "evil-minded persons" which have influenced the latter. The Panchen Lama concluded that, as he did not want to further embarrass the Dalai Lama, he had taken the decision to leave his seat *"for a short period to make it easier for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I am going to see whether I can secure any one to mediate between us...It is quite impossible for me to make the annual contribution to meet the military expenses and I am compelled to proceed to an unknown destination to try to raise funds from the Buddhists [patrons]."*

Tibetans troops under Lungshar³⁶ were sent to try to stop him but Lhasa had reacted too late. Later the Dalai Lama replied to the Panchen Lama that Lungshar was sent to persuade him to return to his monastery *"for the sake of the Buddhist religion and the good government of the country and chiefly for your happiness and prosperity, at a time when religion has reached a stage like a lamp in which all the oil has become nearly consumed."*

The Dalai Lama concluded: *"As you and your ministers have left Shigatse and gone to a foreign country, the Tibetan Government will appoint a Dzaza Lama (monk administrator) and send him to Tashilhunpo without delay to manage the internal and external affairs for the benefit of all."*

The Dalai Lama accordingly appointed an ecclesiastic Prime Minister as the administrator of the Tashilhunpo.

In July 1924, the Panchen Lama wrote from China informing the Dalai Lama that some evil persons in his entourage had 'an axe to grind' and *'have been creating estrangement and inconvenience between us'*. Apparently, one of the complaints of the Panchen Lama was that the entourage of the Dalai Lama had refused him interview: *"so as to lay before Your Holiness the real state of affairs as it is in my mind and obtain Your Holiness' true advice as to what is the best thing to be done towards paying this new army expenditure tax."*

In his reply, the Dalai Lama mentioned that the tax was levied *"in order to make permanent the secular and religious rule of Tibet, it was found expedient to assess and collect extra taxes"*. He also regretted that the two Lamas have not been able to meet due to some individuals in their entourage.

One of the persons who played the most active role (and the one referred by the Panchen Lama) was Lungshar who had managed to

³⁶ He certainly was the "evil-minded" person mentioned by the Panchen Lama.

remove Tsarong from his post of Commander-in-Chief and had become the strong man of Tibet. He wanted to impose Lhasa's rule over Tashilhunpo.

After leaving Shigatse, the Panchen Lama first went to Mongolia and then reached China in February 1924. Of course, the Chinese were delighted to receive him. He was received with all honours by the Emperor and although the Chinese were very busy with their civil war, they felt confident that, with the Panchen Lama card in their hand, they could again have a role to play in the Tibetan affairs. In 1928, emboldened by the presence of the Tibetan Lama, the Chinese government decided to form the new provinces of Sikang which included large parts of Kham and of Qinghai (with large parts of Amdo).

They were officially declared as provinces of China, even though the Chinese government could not immediately assume administrative power due to the rivalries between different warlords of Sichuan and Qinghai areas.

The damage to Tibet was done and the partition eventually became a permanent administrative division of the Tibetan territory in the 60's. The Chinese have always been masters to create divisions which may have no reality today but which could be used tomorrow to the benefit of their empire.

Another of these creations was the Mongolian and Tibetan Commission which was also formed in 1928 under the Executive Yuan (Nationalist Cabinet); only many years later it will be used as a proof that Tibet and Mongolia had always been part of China.

An allegation is not always a proof of what is alleged, but by constantly alleging something, the Chinese believe that the allegations can become reality.

The following remark of the Chinese historian Tieh-Tseng-Li shows how dangerous for the unity and integrity of Tibet was the presence

of the Panchen Lama in China: *“in 1928, a year after the establishment of the Nationalist Government in Nanjing, the Panchen sent delegates to express his respects to the new regime, and at the same time put forward a request that the Chinese Government assume full charge of affairs in Tibet in order to save it to become a second India.”*

The preceding events marked a watershed in the Dalai Lama's internal and foreign policy. The departure of the Panchen Lama, who was highly revered by the Tibetan people from all over the country, was considered as a bad omen. He was known to all as a gentle and very erudite Lama. His departure somehow strengthened the conservative forces in Lhasa. Many thought that the British with their 'modern' ideas had influenced the Dalai Lama and soon the British role in the Tibetan internal affairs declined and thereby the urgency for Tibet to build its security requirement slowly disappeared ³⁷. The old habit of keeping Tibet close on to the outside ³⁸ again prevailed. Once more, Tibet had lost a chance to assert itself on the international stage.

In the modern history of Tibet, the British are often represented as the most progressive forces, but their responsibility in the dispute between the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama cannot be denied. They had also been the first during Simla Conference to suggest the division of Tibet in different administrative zones ³⁹ and when the Chinese nationalists created the provinces of Sikang and Qinghai amalgamating more than half of Tibet's territory, the Chinese only used a British concept.

³⁷ Especially after the removal of Tsarong.

³⁸ Or open only to the Chinese side.

³⁹ Partition of Tibet in Inner and Outer Tibet in 1914 in Simla.

The British had also their own commercial and strategic interests in the region and their benevolent help to train and arm a Tibetan regiment was not unselfish.

It is also true that they have been more concerned by what was happening in Tashilhunpo which is relatively close to the Indian border than what was happening in remote districts of Kham or Amdo.

They could very well after the refusal of the Chinese to ratify the Simla Convention, taken a strong stand on the status of Tibet or even have declared Tibet an independent state, but for the own political interest they preferred a politics of ambiguity and vagueness⁴⁰. Nevertheless, all in all, the British and specially some bold officers like Sir Charles Bell always encouraged the Dalai Lama and the people of Tibet to stand on their own feet, something the Chinese Ambans or Beijing never did.

That way, we can say that an opportunity for Tibet to assert itself in international politics, was missed. New opportunities do not come often.

The most dramatic part of this story was the split between the two religious leaders and the fact that the following years this will fully be used by the Chinese government to assure his control over Tibet. The story will not end with the passing away of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the 9th Panchen Lama, it continued with their reincarnations and it is still continuing today with the search and recognition of the new 11th Panchen Lama.

It is now the third generation of Panchen Lama's which have been used by the different regimes in China. Could this be the direct consequence of a petty dispute over taxes? It is more certainly the

⁴⁰ This policy of vagueness will be the hallmark of Nehru's Tibet Policy.

result of the play of greater forces which the Tibetans believe to be the results of their past action.

The 9th Panchen Lama, though he had written to the Dalai Lama that he was leaving for a short time, never came back to Tibet, and his reincarnation was eventually found in 1939 in Qinghai province, near Sining⁴¹. His recognition was more or less imposed by force on Lhasa in May 1951 during the negotiations on the 17 Point Agreement

The deep division between the two highest reincarnations of Tibet was not a good omen for the future and the two Lamas were certainly aware of it, but they could not do much to stop the 'karmic' or logic (depending how one sees it) consequences to reach its final destination.

Eventually the two reincarnations (the 10th Panchen Lama and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama) played similar roles in their following life.

The Dalai Lama was forced to live but in exile in India while the Panchen Lama had to remain a virtual prisoner in Tibet under Chinese occupation. After his rehabilitation in the early eighties, he mostly lived in Beijing and was used by the Chinese government for its own propaganda.

The division of their entourage symbolised the division between those who thought that Tibet should assert her independence and for this purpose built a strong army⁴² and have an independent foreign policy and those who believed in the traditional relationship with China and maintained that Tibet should remain the land of the Buddhist faith and for this reason, be closer to China.

For the latter, there were two ways to save Tibet, one was to use spiritual means to defend itself against the outside influence and interference and the other was to find a Buddhist patron to militarily protect Tibet. It was without planning for the arrival on the Asian

⁴¹ The present Dalai Lama is born in the same area.

⁴² With the help of the British and later India.

stage of a power which only believed in the barrel of the guns and branded religion as a poison.

With retrospect, it is a pity that the reforms of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama were blocked by his own people and in particular his own monasteries.

He was prevented to build a strong and self-reliant Tibet, with a modern, well-educated and progressive elite which could have brought the necessary changes without destroying the basic Buddhist faith.

But perhaps karma is karma and it is not so easy to stop the train of 'karmic consequences'.

The Conservative Tilt

The Case of Tsarong, Lungshar and. Kunphela

The three main favourites of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama were Tsarong Damdul, Kunphela a monk attending to the Dalai Lama and Lungshar, a lay official who had accompanied the first (and last) batch of young Tibetans to England for schooling.

Lungshar was supposed to be one of the brightest Tibetans of his time, but was a schemer and even an adept of black magic according to some. In the words of Hugh Richardson, he was “drunk with power”. Already in England, he had been behaving so badly that the Tibetan Government had to give the charge of the Tibetan children to Colonel Leslie Weir, who would later become the Political Officer in Sikkim.

Until the mid-twenties, Tsarong was the most powerful man in Tibet after the Dalai Lama. Known as the hero of Chaksam, he was born in a poor family. He became the Dalai Lama’s favourite in 1910, saving his leader’s life when the latter was on his way to India. The Chinese troops were trying to catch hold of the Lama when Tsarong with a few hundreds of the Dalai Lama’s bodyguards, stopped the Chinese near the Chaksam Bridge on the Tsangpo River (Brahmaputra), one day journey from Lhasa. Tsarong delayed the Chinese long enough to allow the Dalai Lama to take refuge in Chumbi Valley and then in India.

When the Tibetan leader came back to Tibet two years later, he remembered the services of Tsarong and gave him a noble family’s name and an estate. Due to his proximity to the Dalai Lama, Tsarong became the strong man of Tibet; he was nominated the Senior Most Minister and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army.

In the mid-twenties, through constant schemes, Lungshar managed to get Tsarong demoted and sent to India on a pilgrimage of

'convenience'. When Tsarong returned to India, Lungshar was the new master of Tibet.

The pro-British foreign policy of Tibet started tilting towards China. Lungshar began using his post as the leader of the National Assembly to influence the Dalai Lama and the monks. He even managed to convince the big monasteries against the great danger of modernisation. The opening up of Tibet to the outside world and the preparation of the armed forces was more or less abandoned. The third player in the game, Kunphela was the personal attendant of the Dalai Lama. In the last years before the Tibetan leader's death in 1933, Kunphela raised to become the chief favourite and the most powerful person of the Roof of the World.

The struggle of these three men represented in some ways the changes occurring in Tibet and the entry of Tibet in the modern world. Their struggle focussed around the control over the army. While Tsarong was perhaps the only one with a vision of Tibet's strategic interests in the Great Game and the importance of the army for the future of Tibet, Lungshar saw in it more a personal tool to achieve his personal aim of controlling Tibet. He always resented Tsarong at the head of a strong army and worked very hard on the Dalai Lama to show to the pontiff the danger of Tsarong becoming too powerful.

At the end of the twenties, Lungshar who was also holding the Finance portfolio, became the Commander-in-Chief in place of Tsarong; Lungshar had reached his zenith.

Then Kunphela entered on stage.

Like Tsarong, he was from a poor peasant family but had been chosen by the Dalai Lama to be his personal attendant. He was intelligent but not well educated. The two protagonists could only clash.

While his arrogance and unscrupulous actions attracted him a lot of enemies, Lungshar slowly began losing his weight in the state affairs.

When Kunphela was nominated as the new Commander-in-Chief, Lungshar was partially demoted. But the latter was waiting for his hour. During these days Kunphela was going around Lhasa in the Austin car of the Dalai Lama creating sensation.

Although Kunphela was the new strong man of Lhasa, he was trying to remain just and do his duty to the best of his capacities. He was sometimes authoritarian and once he is said to have dismissed a minister and several officials for inefficient handling of a construction work. For many years he had no official government job, but derived his authority from the fact that he was the '*Kuchar*', the person always in presence of the Dalai Lama.

Willamson, the British Political Officer in Sikkim described in this way "*The Dalai Lama was attended its tea on the dais by Kusho Kunphe La, a tall rather good-looking young man of 26. He is next to the Dalai Lama, undoubtedly the most powerful person in Tibet. He has an immense influence on the Dalai Lama. He is extremely clever and intelligent and his talents would bring him to the fore anywhere*".

A few years before his death the Dalai Lama appointed Kunphela as the head of the Drapchi Office which comprised the coin and currency mints and the ammunitions factory. He was also responsible for Trongdra Regiment. This crack regiment composed from members from the 'better' families as his name indicates was a modern outfit, well equipped and efficient. The place Drapchi had according to Willamson, "*an air of energy and efficiency which is rare in Tibet*".

The problem for Kunphela who had no official rank was that he made many enemies amongst the aristocracy especially amongst the ministers who were resenting that his power was not due to his

blood, but his proximity of the Dalai Lama. Further, his regiment was feared by many in Lhasa.

In 1933, a few months before the Dalai Lama passed away, Williamson is said to have prophetically remarked that Kunphela had *“many enemies and will be in a very difficult position after the death of the Dalai Lama.”*

Kunphela indeed remained in power till the death of the Dalai Lama in December 1933. Though after the Dalai Lama’s demise, Kunphela was for many, the favourite for the post of Regent and his name was proposed, the monasteries decided to choose someone amongst the high-incarnated lamas and Reting Rinpoche was chosen.

A few days later, Lungshar and the National Assembly began accusing Kunphela to have kept the Dalai Lama’s disease secret and to have provoked his death by administering some wrong medicine in connivance with the Nechung State Oracle and the Private Physician of the Dalai Lama.

The great schemer Lungshar managed to incite the monks in the monasteries who asked: *“How could have the Dalai Lama died so suddenly?”*

Many witnesses were brought to the Assembly and finally Kunphela himself had to appear and explain that the Dalai Lama had stated, a year earlier, in his ‘Last Testament’ that he had not many years to live. As he was often subject to colds, he had not worried when the Dalai Lama felt sick.

But Lungshar knew the weakness of Kunphela; he provoked a mutiny of the Trongdra Regiment. It was not too difficult as the troops were raised from the ‘better families’ which did not appreciate their forced recruitment⁴³ in the army.

⁴³ Though the rich families would often send some of their servants to serve on their behalf.

In the meantime the soldiers started marching towards Lhasa to present their petition to the Kashag. Lungshar announced that the Assembly was threatened by the manipulations of Kunphela and asked the monks of Sera to come and defend the arsenal and the mint. The Kashag took stock of the situation and posted some troops of the Dalai Lama's bodyguard regiments at Drapchi. The mutineers were forbidden to join again their regiment and though the Assembly had not been able to take over the power, the last tool in the hand of Kunphela had gone.

The following day when the hearings began again in the Assembly, the supporters of Lungshar launched a blistering attack against the Dalai Lama's favourite and he was soon accused to have murdered the Dalai Lama.

He was arrested and discussion started about the punishment to be inflicted to him and his supporters such as the Pandatshang brothers. A few days later, most of the assembly cooled down and admitted that the Dalai Lama had not been murdered. However Kunphela was accused to have kept secret the condition of the Dalai Lama. He was banished and all his properties were confiscated. He left for exile for Kongpo in south Tibet. Many officials felt very sorry for Kunphela who had always the Dalai Lama's favourite and had served him well. His energy and efficiency were regretted by many. Once more, the forces of progress had been subdued and the conservative forces had won a battle. Lungshar was the new master of Tibet. But not for long!

Lungshar had committed a first blunder soon after he had taken over from Tsarong as the Commander-in-chief of the army. One Tibetan named Gylapo who was married to a Nepali lady had illegally opened a liquor shop in Lhasa. When an arrest warrant was issued against him by the Magistrate of Lhasa, he took refuge in the Nepali legacy. Though, he was given refuge by the Nepalese Resident. Lungshar

decided to send the police inside the legacy and arrest Gyalpo. This was in contradiction with the Treaty of 1856 with Nepal; it nearly provoked a war between the two countries. Eventually the British managed to mediate and the affair was arranged. Lungshar, however lost his prestige and his post in the army, though he remained a Finance Secretary ⁴⁴

The fall of Lungshar came soon after he had been able to eliminate Kunphela. After dismantling the regiment of Kunphela, Lungshar gathered some young officials and officers and established an organisation called the *'Happy Union'*.

The official objectives of the organisation were to bring social reforms in the government circles. However a few officers in the inner circle around Lungshar knew that the real purpose had far reached consequences: Lungshar was planning to introduce a secular government in Tibet. One of the conspirators, Rimshi Kashopa reported the plans to Kalon Trimon, one of the Cabinet ministers who himself reported to the Regent who ordered the immediate arrest of Lungshar.

The Residence of Lungshar was raided, incriminating documents proving the facts were found. It was also proved that he had planned to assassinate Kalon Trimon. The sentence was very severe: Lungshar was deprived of his eyesight and condemned to life imprisonment.

It was the end of Lungshar; though the loser was Tibet.

⁴⁴ Tsipon.

The Policy of Isolation

British School in Gyantse

In 1921, after a very successful visit to Lhasa of Sir Charles Bell ⁴⁵, the British government worked out a new Tibet policy. London decided to help Tibet to stand on her feet and strengthen her autonomy.

While in Lhasa, Charles Bell had met many times the Dalai Lama who had told him: *"We have known each other for a long time, and in you I have complete confidence, for we two are men of like mind. I pray continually that you might return to Lhasa"*.

Bell's visit marked the height of the relations between British India and Tibet. The main points of the new policy were that Tibet was permitted to import arms in sufficient quantity for self-defence and that the British were to train the Tibetan troops and teach them the manufacture of gun powder and rifles. It was further agreed that a Tibetan school would be opened in Gyantse for the upper middle class and the school would have a British headmaster.

For Sir Charles Bell the British motives were clear *"Tibet should enjoy internal autonomy, free to live her life and her freedom will be the best possible for the northern frontier of India."*

At that time, Tsarong was the predominant political force in Tibet. He was the first leader to encourage a reform movement and the Dalai Lama fully supported him. Tsarong had travelled with the Dalai Lama to Mongolia, China and India. During his peregrinations, he had understood that Tibet would not be able to survive if it was to remain isolated from the rest of the world. The Land of Snows had to have her own foreign policy.

⁴⁵ The Political Officer in Sikkim.

He knew about the great mass movements which were taking places all over the world and for him Tibet had to participate. Though the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had declared the independence of Tibet in 1912, the only way to preserve this newly found freedom was to have a strong army.

During the reign of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama the concept of non-violence or the question of a Gandhian movement was unknown in Tibet: the Dalai Lama and Tsarong were absolutely clear that Tibet needed a strong army

They knew that without a strong military force, whatever success might be achieved on the diplomatic or spiritual front, there was no chance for Tibet to survive the pressure and interference of the powerful neighbours such as China, Russia or British India.

For modern reformers in Lhasa, the British had certainly less vested interests than the Chinese or the Russian. The British troops under Col. Francis Younghusband had shown in 1904 that we were not too greedy to colonise Tibet. It was in fact pointed out that after they had defeated the Tibetan troops, the treatment they had imposed on the Tibetans was rather mild.

The opening of the British School in Gyantse should be seen in this perspective, Tsarong thought that a strong alliance with the British with many young Tibetan being trained and educated by the British was the only way to modernise Tibet. After the first experiment in 1913, when some four young Tibetans were sent⁴⁶ for higher education to Britain, it was thought that it would be worth continuing the experience with an English teacher coming and teaching in Tibet. For the same cost, many more children whose parents could not afford to send their children to Kalimpong or Darjeeling for studies,

⁴⁶ With Lungshar, the lay official who later played a very important role on the political scene in Lhasa.

could benefit of a modern education; they could learn foreign languages and acquire modern knowledge.

The school was first to be established in Lhasa, but the Dalai Lama and his advisors immediately saw that the proximity of the large monasteries could be an impediment to the smooth functioning of the school. That is one of the reasons why Gyantse, where the British Trade Mart was located, was selected and in 1923, the school was finally opened.

The idea of a 'secular' school had never been well accepted by the monasteries which thought that a foreign culture would spoil the purity of their religion. It was also seen as an encroachment on their nearly total monopoly on education.

The monks most probably also feared that a school could only bring new ideas which would be subversive for the established system.

Another example shows how the monks reacted to the new ideas and habits. Some of the young officers who had joined the new regiment of Tsarong had cut their hair and dressed with British uniforms. For some of the monks in Lhasa, it was not acceptable and pressure began building up until they were dismissed by the Dalai Lama for their non-traditional body attitude.

For the most conservative strata of the Tibetan society, this new hair style was a sign that the traditional values of Tibet were abandoned and new foreign values adopted.⁴⁷

In 1924, the power of Tsarong was being questioned mainly due to the jealousy of some other favourites of the Dalai Lama; they intrigued to get him out of power. The schemers (mainly Lungshar) found an excuse to replace Tsarong when a fight erupted between the police forces in Lhasa and some officers of the new army

⁴⁷ We remember that in the early seventies, the older Tibetans were very upset when their children were wearing 'elephant' pants. The youngsters were accused to forget their traditional values.

regiment. Being the Commander-in-Chief, Tsarong felt responsible and ordered very harsh punishment to the guilty soldiers and officers. The opponents of Tsarong used this as a pretext to show to the Dalai Lama that Tsarong was a power by himself, no more referring the problems to the National Assembly or the Kashag or even the Dalai Lama. They argued that it was dangerous to leave the control over army in one person's hand.

As a result of the manipulations of Lungshar, Tsarong was sent into a semi-exile to the South and then to India for a 'pilgrimage'.

On his way to Dromo near the Indian border, he passed through Gyantse where he was received by Frank Ludlow, the British schoolmaster of the school., Rinchen Dolma Taring, Tsarong's wife ⁴⁸ recalled that the students lined up to receive Tsarong. She wrote in her autobiography⁴⁹: *"Most of the monks were opposed to any change in the life of Tibet and to all influences from other countries. The Great Monasteries had such power that they sometimes objected successfully even to His Holiness' plans."*

Eventually Tsarong was demoted as the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and the monasteries managed to put enough pressure on the Dalai Lama to close the school. During an interview with the Dalai Lama, he told us:

"In the world of politics also, if, after the first batch, the Tibetan Government had continuously sent Tibetans students, then [at the time of the Chinese invasion] we would have had at least a few hundreds of our civil servants who would have been speaking English. Naturally they would have been able to deal better with foreigners. It was important [at that time] to safeguard Tibetan independence and Tibetan rights."

⁴⁸ She later Jigme Taring a very Senior Officer linked with the Sikkim royal family.

⁴⁹ Daughter of Tibet, by Rinchen Dolma Taring,

In his autobiography, he again mentioned about this failure of the Tibetan government to introduce reforms.

“For example, when he [the Thirteenth Dalai Lama] tried to open a British school in Lhasa, a lot of obstacles arose. So he tried to send some students to England, but again the Tibetans resented his attempts at modernisation and created obstacles. After this failure he attempted to have some students educated in British schools in India, but that also met with obstacles. Next he opened a British school in Gyantse, but finally that too disappeared.

Then during my childhood another British school was opened in Lhasa. I remember the English teacher there quite well. The school only survived a few months before being closed down. The obstacles to the above attempts at modernisation were created by narrow-minded people. This was something the Thirteenth Dalai Lama fought against all his life. The failure of his attempts to establish a British school is some-thing very regrettable.

The first batch of students that he sent to England only remained a few years. But on my first Visit to England I was shown the reports written on them by their teachers. The reports were generally good, and described them as hard working and industrious. They were there between 1913 and 17. If the Thirteenth's attempts to introduce modern education into Tibet had not met with such intense resistance by traditionalists, our history may have taken quite a different turn. Several decades passed between those attempts and the Chinese invasion.

The conservatives were afraid that too much exposure to the West would corrupt our youth and perhaps destroy their faith in Buddhism. Granted, there would perhaps have been some

cultural casualties; but this would not be the fault of modern education nor of the West. It would be our own fault for failing first to provide these students with sufficiently deep philosophical grounding in their own tradition. If, as a preliminary, they had been given a thorough training in their own culture on a non-superficial level, this would have been able to sustain them within their own cultural tradition while permitting them to acquire modern knowledge.

With a modern education these students would have been able to master international diplomacy. Then, with the radical changes that ensued, during and following World War II, they perhaps would have been able to explore legal and diplomatic ways to get Tibet into the United Nations and put us beyond China's grasp. As it was, because of the failure of these attempts to create a system of modern education, we passed through this period of dynamic international change as though asleep. Then when China decided to invade us, we were completely unprepared.

My predecessor, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, was a very great and forward looking man. But he was working with a conservative society, and sometimes it was difficult for him to convince the other Tibetan leaders to institute his ideas.

The British school in Gyantse was finally closed in 1926, hardly three years after it had opened. There is no doubt that it is very much connected with the fall from grace of Tsarong Shape.

Another attempt: the British School in Lhasa

A new attempt was made two decades later and again it failed due to the same conservative forces.

In 1944, it was decided to open a British school this time in the Tibetan capital, the experience which had failed in Gyantse eighteen years earlier was tried again.

A British teacher, Mr. Parker was engaged as the headmaster.

Prior to the inauguration of the school, permission was obtained from the different wings of the Tibetan executive and even the Regent put his stamp on the new experience.

Kashopa who was a senior Kalon at that time described the inauguration:

After the chanting of prayers, the students were given Tibetan slate and a master copy of calligraphy. Dry tracing calligraphy on the slate was done by the Tibetan teacher and the Tibetan lesson was inaugurated. Similarly, Mr. Parker distributed English text-books and started the English lesson. Tsi Khang presented a silk scarf to the Tibetan teacher Aepa Yondag Phuntsok Dhondup with various gifts. The English teacher Mr. Parker was presented with a silk scarf and various gifts.

Then Tsipon Kashopa read out the sealed decree of the regent declaring the opening of the school, translated simultaneously into English explaining clearly the precepts of conduct to all the students and teachers. The daily English classes began.

According to Kashopa it was *"the monk and lay factions of the ex-regent Reting which began to instigate rumours against this school specially in the three major monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Ganden accusing the school of inimical designs on the Buddhist religion of Tibet"*

In the rarefied air of the Roof of the World, the rumours circulated very fast and soon the abbots of the three major monasteries decided to hold a meeting and discussed the merits and future of the school. Kashopa said:

This gathering of the abbots and representatives of the three monasteries resolved first to approach the regent Tagdra and the Kashag to request them to consider closing the English school immediately which the Tibetans were unwilling to accept as it would prove extremely harmful to the political administration and Buddhist religion of Tibet. They further resolved that if the regent and the Kashag does not take their request into consideration, the three monasteries will collect a large number of monk Dob-Dobs⁵⁰ who will gather in Lhasa and destroy the school then and there.

The abbots finally approach the Kashag and request them to convene the National Assembly to discuss an important matter. The abbots told the Kashag that "recently an English school was opened at Lhasa without discussing the matter in the National Assembly and as the school was harmful to the religion and politics of Tibet, they felt concerned to question on the why's and how's of this school."

The ministers tried to defend the opening of the school and argue that they had taken prior permission from the Regent; it was a joint project between the Tibetan and British Governments; it would be useful to the present and future political requirements of Tibet. The abbots did not accept the argument and said that "*as the political and religious conditions of Tibet are critical, we feel it is best not to degrade and degenerate the situation any further and therefore hoped that what has been burnt by fire can be healed by fire. But, if the "river has no bridge across it, there is no way out but to cross it by swimming."*

There were determined to close it down. The abbots further threatened that the school will be closed by force and the monk

⁵⁰ The huge monk policemen.

policemen will forcefully take away the students to their families which were in any case attached to one of the three monasteries. The Abbots remained adamant to close or destroy the school. Though most of the officials and the aristocrats were not keen to close the school, fear entered the Tibetan capital and wild rumours about the dobs destroying the school and kidnapping the students began circulating.

At the end, there was no alternative for the Kashag but to decide to close a British school, for a second time in 20 years.

Another strong rumour circulated at that time among the aristocrats who wanted the school to remain open, they strongly believed that the *“whole incident had been instigated by the Kuomintang Chinese”*. There is probably some truth in this rumour as most of the monks believed that China could better protect their religion than British India. The future will prove them wrong.

The school had functioned for three months and as the winter vacation approached, Parker took the opportunity to make a visit around Shigatse, but he already knew that his assignment had come to an end.

Kashopa said: *“The Foreign Office informed the Assistant Political Officer Major Sherab on the closing of the English School in Lhasa due to unfortunate reactions from the monk and lay populace of Lhasa, the English school had to be closed down.”*

But to avoid a diplomatic incident, a grand reception (and farewell) was given on Parker’s return. He was presented with many gifts and certificate to compensate for the lost of his job and the abrupt conclusion of the Anglo-Tibetan project.

Parker was asked to leave Tibet, but a very polite way was used.

The Foreign Office begged forgiveness of the teachers for the great difficulty in their journey to Lhasa and volunteered to meet all the expenses incurred on this journey. The Foreign Office

sought assurance on the friendly relations between the British and the Tibetan Government and stated that the Tibetan Government has now decided to send students to English schools in India and sought continuing British help in this. Parker nevertheless got a certificate saying: "As the students were young, the Tibetan populace suspected they might forsake their traditional behaviour. As such, due to the unfavourable reaction from the Tibetan public, the school had to be closed for the time being as already conveyed to the Political Officer of Sikkim through Assistant Major Sherab.

Otherwise, Mr. Parker was dedicated to teaching and had no fault whatsoever. To keep his sentiments, the Tibetan Government provided every facility possible and requested the Indian Government, in the interest of Anglo-Tibetan friendship, to be more considerate and helpful to Mr. Parker.

It was probably the Tibetan diplomatic way to throw someone out with compassion. During the reception in his honour, Parker denigrated the ministers who *"were like children who run after whatever others say"*.

Twenty years earlier, Tsarong, then Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan army, had also received his dismissal order in a beautifully written form. He was informed that in view of the peaceful atmosphere within Tibet and with Tibet's neighbours, the post of Commander-in-Chief was no more necessary and the Deputy Commander-in-Chief would assume the command.

But Tibet had lost another chance to open itself to the outside world. The great monasteries had probably forgotten the teaching of their master.

One day, while visiting the Kingdom of Kosala, the Buddha passed through a small town called Kesaputra, where the Kalamas were living. Very often they were visited by mendicants, ascetics and

wanderers of all kinds. Each one preached his own truth, his own path. The Kalamas were actually quite confused by all these different teachings; so when they heard of the forthcoming visit of the Buddha, they thought it could be a good occasion to clarify their confusion as the Buddha already had a very high reputation in the area.

"Lord, we are very confused, so many ascetics and Brahmins are visiting us; they teach different truths, each one pretends that his own truth is the only one. They all strongly condemn the other paths. Tell us what to do, whom to believe,"

'Kalamas, to find out where the truth lies, you should not depend on certain things: the first is tradition. Also do not depend on hearsay, on the scriptures, on rumours. Do not decide on the good and bad only on the good reputation of a teacher, or on the appearances of things.

"Kalamas, remember also that you do not have the means to know all the facts of truth; therefore, you should not come to the conclusion, 'My conclusion is the only true one, everything else is false.' You would become dogmatic. So, Kalamas, do not be satisfied by hearsay or just because 'the monk is our teacher' or 'the monk has said'. Analyse by yourself even my words, see if they are conducive to good and happiness, study the cause and the origin of actions: if they are born out of ignorance, hatred or greed, they are certainly not good".

On many other occasions, the Buddha taught the same thing to disciples: 'As the wise test gold by burning, cutting and rubbing it (on a piece of touchstone), so are you to accept my words only after examining them and not merely out of regard for me

Unfortunately, the abbots were not ready to taste anything else than their own tradition. It was not a healthy situation which led to further and further isolation and ultimately to the loss of Tibet's

independence. As the Dalai Lama pointed out, if a few hundreds of young men and girls had received a 'foreign' education in the first decades of the 20th century, the Roof of the World would have certainly be able to deal better with the foreign powers and communicate its plight.

A Divided Nation

Khampa vs. Lhasa

Not only the Tibetans were not united in their purpose and their leaders were fighting amongst themselves, but the different provinces of Tibet did share the same perception of the unity of their nation.

Let us take the example of the Kham province of Eastern Tibet. The Pandatshangs were one of the famous Khampa families engaged in trading. Their prominence came during the reign of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama when they became the major trading partners of the Tibetan government. It started when one of the brothers, Nyima helped the Dalai Lama to come back to Tibet after his exile in India and had protected him day and night with its personal army.

The wool business developed tremendously in the following years and Nyima established a network spreading from Kalimpong to China with its headquarters in Lhasa. The Pandatshangs like a many others trading family of Kham (the Andruktshang, the Sadutshang) formed a new bourgeoisie who had travelled a lot in Asia and often assimilated certain Western concepts⁵¹. They were keen to introduce these ideas in Tibet while the most conservative elements, the clergy and the aristocracy were mainly interested to keep their hold on the society.

One of the Pandatshangs' brother, Yarphel who was looking after the family interest in Lhasa had been suspected by the National Assembly to support Kunphela.

Though the communications network was not very developed, the rumours were moving fast in Tibet. After hearing of the latest news

⁵¹ In fact not only of the West, but also the ideas introduced during the freedom struggle in India and the Revolution in China. For the Tibetans, the *plaque tournante* of these news ideas was Kalimpong.

from Lhasa, one of the brothers, Tobgye who was a military man and was holding the official rank of Rupon (Colonel) since 1930, decided to act; he believed that the Lhasa government would soon not only arrest Yarphe in Lhasa but the rest of the family in Kham.

The Khampas were not ready to get 'bullied' by Lhasa and after having checked through a divination that his brother was 'in danger', Tobgye decided to advocate a sort of self-rule or autonomy for Kham.

They took over the city of Markhan and attacked the arsenal at night capturing some mountain guns and at least 500 rifles.

Once Tobgye and his men were in control of the area, they distributed some pamphlets and went around explaining their views on the situation in Lhasa.

It appears that the appeal to revolt against Lhasa did not arise too much sympathy from the local population and two months later when the Governor of Kham counter-attacked with a large contingent of troops, he had not much difficulties to defeat the Pandatshangs who had no other opportunity that to take refuge in Batang, a Chinese controlled area of Kham.

The Tibetan Government protested to the Chinese who remained more or less neutral and did not try to use the Pandatshang one way or another; the reasons being that a large army in the area was not bound to rejoice the warlord of Sichuan, though the Central Chinese government had very little control in the area.

According to *The Melong*⁵², the first Tibetan newspaper in Kalimpong very close to Rabga, the younger Pandatshang brothers and the intellectual of the family, once Tobgye army passed on the other side of the Yangtse, the Chinese got very alarmed. The Chinese general Lui Wenhui ordered his troops to immediately attack them. This was

⁵² The Mirror.

followed by a series of battles, not only against the Chinese warlord who was on the side of the nationalists, but also against the Communists who while fleeing northwards during their Long March passed through this part of Tibet.

By the end the Khampa army was defeated and the regiment disbanded.

After many adventures, Rabga managed to flee to Kanting where General Lui offered him the post of military commander of Kham and later tried to take him away to Yanan where Mao was staying. Finally by simulating to be totally addicted to opium, he managed to make it to Nanking and from there to Kalimpong.

After the news of the revolt in Markhan had reached Lhasa, the Kashag immediately decided to seal the properties of the Pandatshangs in the Tibetan capital and to arrest Yarphe. At the same time, the Kashag wrote to the British government requesting him to freeze the assets of the family in Kalimpong. But before the British could act, the case was already solved in Lhasa.

When the police came to arrest Yarphe, as a true Khampa he swore to fight back and use his servants and men with their weaponry to defend his house.

Taken by surprise, the police did not know how to react at first; the Kashag also was embarrassed. It gave enough time for Yarphe to call on some of his relations in the Great Monasteries, especially one of the retired Ganden Tri Rinpoche as well as Pabongka Rinpoche, the most famous 'yellow hat' lama of his time. Pabongka accepted to personally plead their case with the Kashag and the National Assembly. He explained that Yarphe had no knowledge of his brother's actions in Kham and he could not be made a scapegoat for them. He further told the Cabinet of Ministers and especially Trimon Shape, the senior most Minister at that time that if the Kashag decided to sealed the Pandatshang business, it is Tibet which will

suffer the most as they had a monopoly on the wool market even to the United States.

The Kashag understood well this argument and the matter was close. The British were informed of the changed decision. They were told that the *“various heads of the monasteries and different traders had pleaded on behalf of the family and the Pandatshang (in Lhasa) would forthwith send men from the family to Kham to advise and enjoined the brothers there not to behave in such an ungrateful manner... For the present no action is to be taken against the agent in Kalimpong”*.

Some street-songs said that the money of the rich Khampas had bribed Trimon Shape.

The story was finished for the moment but once again it showed the deep division of the Tibetan society at the time of the Dalai Lama's death.

The words of the Lama resound again when he said that the Dalai Lama had no other choice to leave his terrestrial body at that time due to negative karma accumulated by the Tibetans.

The financial implication of the crushing of Pandatshang were too important for the Lhasa government to be ignored, but the deep resentment between the Khampas and the Lhasa government which had crystallised in the Markhan revolt, would reappear a few years later when the Chinese forces invaded Tibet. It only after the Khampas suffered themselves for many years under the Chinese occupation that a unified force of resistance⁵³ would be organised under another Khampa leader, Gompo Tashi Anduktshang:

Not only the Pandatshangs, but most of the Khampas thought that they were treated by the Lhasians as barbarians only knowing how to fight. For the aristocrats of Lhasa posted in Kham, it often was

⁵³ The famous Chu Chik Kang Druk (Four Rivers, Six Ranges).

only an occasion to get rich in a short time on the back of the uneducated and rough Khampas. The contempt shown by the Lhaseans to the Khampas was reciprocal and it is described at length in the reports from George Patterson and Robert Ford.

In 1924, F.M. Bailey, the Political Officer in Sikkim had noted that in some places, the people preferred the Chinese rule as the transport corvée imposed by Lhasa on the Khampas.

One can only conclude that it is a great pity that Tibet was not able to unite her forces after the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and fight a common battle against the Communists invaders in the early fifties.

The Fight of the Regents

Reting vs. Taktra

When the Thirteenth Dalai Lama passed away in 1933, the Kashag in consultation with the National Assembly nominated a young lama called Reting Rinpoche as the Regent. The first preoccupation of the young and inexperienced lama was to build of golden Stupa for the remains of the deceased Dalai Lama and to look for the new incarnation of the Tibetan leader. A lot of responsibilities were put on his young shoulders, but he eventually managed to build a magnificent mausoleum for the Dalai Lama.

He then visited the holy lake of Lhamoi Lhatso, locked between very high mountains of the Land of Snows. There he had a sacred vision: he saw three letters 'Ah', 'Ka', 'Ma' followed by a picture of a monastery above a village with roofs of jade green and gold and a house in the village with turquoise tiles.

The detailed description was noted down and kept secret. It was to be the key to the recognition of the Dalai Lama's reincarnation.

Two years later, a boy was found in the eastern province of Amdo and the description of the monastery and the village were perfectly corresponding to Reting's vision. After having gone through all the prescribed ritual tests, the boy was declared the reincarnation of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.

The three letters were deciphered as 'Ah' for Amdo, the name of the province of Eastern Tibet, 'Ka' for Kumbum, the largest monastery of the area and 'Ka' and 'Ma' together for Karma Rolpai Dorjee, the name of the monastery of the Fourth Karmapa where the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had stayed a few years earlier while he was returning from China.

In 1939, a few months after the search delegation's visit, the young Dalai Lama was brought back to Lhasa and the following year, he

was enthroned as the Fourteenth incarnation of the Dalai Lama in the presence of foreign representatives of India, China, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.

A year later, the young Regent, having accomplished his duty, requested the Kashag to accept his temporary resignation. The real reason behind Reting Rinpoche's request to be relieved from his functions are not clear; some believed that he simply wanted to go on retreat, some explained his retirement by his disagreement with some of the senior ministers. But most probably it was because he was no more a monk and having not been able to keep his chastity vows, he was not entitled to ordain the young Dalai Lama⁵⁴. He could not act as his guru during the ordination initiation.

Whatever are the real reasons, the resignation was finally accepted and an old lama called Taktra Rinpoche was nominated as the new Regent. The Reting's supporters felt that in view of the new Regent's age, it would not be a problem to ask Taktra to resign in case Reting wanted to assume power again.

Everything went well for a few years, but one day, the rumour started circulating in Lhasa that Reting was planning to come back.

One of the problems in old Tibet was that the estates⁵⁵ of the important incarnated lamas had become so rich and the monk-administrators⁵⁶ so powerful and attached to their clout and wealth that the precepts of Buddha were often completely forgotten.

The system of rule by incarnation had certainly great spiritual advantages for the transmission of different religious lineages, but it had taken a materialistic turn with the high lamas possessing very large properties which would become the object of the greed and lust

⁵⁴ Only a fully ordained monk having kept all his vows can ordain a new monk.

⁵⁵ Labrang.

⁵⁶ Changzoe.

for the estate administrators. This is especially true when the lama was young or when he was in retreat.

An interesting anecdote is reported by a foreign researcher who interviewed a large number of tulkus or reincarnated lamas in exile in India and the West; he asked them about their previous lives and their motives to reincarnate. One old and respected lama answered that many lamas in Tibet were taking birth again by pure attachment to their estate and wealth.

It is certain that Buddha would have been saddened to see so much material powers in the hands of the monks who in his own time were supposed to daily go and search for their food with their begging bowl as only possession.

As we have seen, the problem took even larger magnitude when Lamas such the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama were involved. Many believe that the Chinese's position in Tibet has been established using the rivalry between the entourages of the two Lamas. It is quite obvious that if the Lamas had been left to themselves, they would have been able to keep their relation at a spiritual level: the relation between a *guru* and a *chela*⁵⁷.

Unfortunately the administrators or collaborators of both Lamas were more interested in political and money power than by the Buddhist Dharma.

A similar rivalry developed between the two Regents and when the rumour circulated in the Tibetan capital that Reting was soon to return and assume power, the supporters of Taktra started lobbying with the Kashag to prevent him.

A few months later a parcel sent from Reting monastery and addressed to the Regent Taktra Rinpoche was found containing some

⁵⁷ Between a Teacher and his disciple.

hand grenades which were supposed to explode when the Regent opens the parcel.

The situation quickly deteriorated and threatened to end up in a civil war when the Kashag decided to arrest Reting who was still living in his monastery located one hundred miles from Lhasa

When the Tibetan troops lead by two senior Ministers reached the monastery, they requested the ex-Regent for an audience and after prostrating three times in front of him, informed him of his arrest and took him to Lhasa.

In the meantime, the monastery of Sera to which Reting belonged, took up arms against the government troops and a very tense situation pervaded the capital of the Land of Snows. It took a few days for the troops loyal to the government to re-establish the order but eventually canons had to be sent to bomb Sera.

In Lhasa, Reting Rinpoche was kept under house arrest pending his and his supporters trial. But before he could be interrogated, he passed away in very mysterious circumstances. All sorts of versions of his death circulated in Lhasa depending if people were pro-Reting or pro-Taktra. Some said that he was assassinated; some said that as a High Lama, he consciously decided to leave his body and performed the rite of 'the transfer of consciousness'.

All sorts of rumours spread about his extraordinary powers. Some said that he turned a porcelain cup inside out and incrustated it in the pillar of the prison. Later, the young Dalai Lama posthumously acquitted him and all his titles and processions were restored.

But here again the point is that the teachings of Buddha had been forgotten. If the supposedly two highest lamas of the country, especially chosen to lead the nation till the young Dalai Lama can take over his temporal powers, ready to take Tibet on the brink of a civil war, was there any moral strength left in the Land of Snows to defend the nation against outside attacks?

This dispute divided deeply the population of Lhasa at a critical period of the Tibetan history, at a time when energies should have been turned toward establishing the independence of Tibet. Had not the Thirteenth Dalai Lama warned and advised the people of Tibet about the consequences of division?

Worse, these events occurred when a Tibetan delegation had gone for the first time to India to attend an International Conference⁵⁸. The message given by the Tibetans fighting amongst themselves was a message of weakness and division. The Nationalist Chinese were themselves too weak and corrupted to be able to use the opportunity but the facts were certainly noted by Mao Zedong and his comrades: Tibet's liberation would not be a big problem for the People's Liberation Army three years later.

⁵⁸ The Asian Relations Conference.

Conclusions

The Teachings of Karma

The Lama we interviewed, emphasised how very powerful a force Karma was. One of its features is that it does not differentiate between small nations such as Tibet or big one such as China. The power of Karma is the same for everyone; only right action and right attitude can rectify the wrongs. He summarized:

When the [results of the] karma comes, nothing can go against it, even big countries with nuclear power. The Government of China cannot go against the power of the karma, there is no way it can.

They have to go through it.

Because, the Dalai Lama (the Thirteenth) knew all the steps and all the [possible] different situations, Tibetans had to go through, he knew exactly.

[Against] these negative karmic arrangements, he made some positive karmic arrangements, [to balance] the negative arrangements. [The birth] of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama was the first positive arrangement he made.

The good point about the theory of Karma is that even if one does not believe in it, it is a fact that helps to see one's difficulties from a more positive angle.

The Lama continued:

Well, I think that the solution will not happen quickly, but slowly, slowly it will come. Even though China is very powerful, China cannot stop them [the karmic consequences]. When Karma is ripe, when everything is 'confirmed', then little by little, from everywhere, all the elements come together, then nobody can stop it.

Like the Berlin wall, nobody could expect it to fall so fast, and one day it just happened. It happened also in Russia which was very powerful, nobody could stop it, within one year everything was changed.

In Romania, in Czechoslovakia, in Hungary, everywhere, Eastern Germany, Poland, everywhere and later in Russia too. The power of the karma is very very strong.

So strong that it is very hard to describe, nobody can describe it. Too extensive, too deep, too vast, when everything comes together, nobody can stop it. That will come one day!

A glimpse of world history gives us a perspective how kingdoms and empires have appeared and disappeared on the stage.

In India itself, one could mention the example of the Mauryan Empire, particularly the Empire built by Asoka. During the reign of the great king, Buddhism spread all over Asia to slowly influence the rest of Asia. Seventy years after the death of Asoka, the Mauryan empire disappeared. A few centuries later, even Buddhism faded away from the subcontinent.⁵⁹

The Buddhist faith itself had evolved and the path of Mahayana became prevalent in North India at the beginning of the second millennium. At the same time, numerous sects had sprung up: many licentious and abhorrent practices appeared and disunity between the different sects, sub-sects and monasteries weakened the propagation of Dharma which became an easy prey for the Moslem invaders.

The Buddha had warned in one of his last sermons of the danger of disunity in society and in the Sangha. Who remembered these prophetic words of the Buddha?

⁵⁹ For several reasons which have been analysed in the *Fate of Tibet*, Buddhist influence weakened to practically disappear in 10th/11th century.

At the end of the sermon quoted earlier, he taught the Bhikkhus the seven conditions of welfare for the benefit of his disciples.

As long as the Bhikkhus shall not be fond of, or delight in, or engage in, business; as long as the Bhikkhus shall not be fond of, or delight in, or engage in, gossiping; as long as the Bhikkhus shall not be fond of, or delight in, sleeping; as long as the Bhikkhus shall not be fond of, or delight in, or indulge in, society; as long as the Bhikkhus shall neither have, nor fall under, the influence of base desires; as long as the Bhikkhus shall not have evil friends or associates and shall not be prone to evil - so long the Bhikkhus shall not stop at mere lesser, special acquisition without attaining Arahatsip.⁶⁰

A similar decline in the Sangha occurred in Tibet at the beginning of the twentieth century when the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had to issue a strong warning in the form of his Last Testament, but to no avail. We saw that Tibet was not only caught napping, but also indulged in many of the evils described by Buddha. The consequences have been tragic and the 'shining' luck has not yet reappeared on the forehead of the Tibetan nation.

Apart from the decline in the Sangha, the Tibetan monasteries had too strong a propensity to protect their concept of the Dharma by closing themselves to the outside world. This seems to be in direct contradiction with the Buddhist doctrine of love, compassion and caring for others which culminated in the Bodhisattva vows and practices.

One could also say that Tibet did not have the 'good fortune' of having to go through a national struggle for independence. In 1947, Tibet was one of the few independent nations of Asia, but instead of

⁶⁰ Narada, op. cit. p. 236.

using this advantage to its benefit, Tibet preferred to remain isolated and live with its small sectarian or regional quarrels.

While the democratic process became predominant the world over, Tibet chose to keep its own political system with its disastrous inter-regnum which during the nineteenth century, had already shown its incapacity to provide not only a good governance, but also to protect the borders against outside influences, mainly the Manchu dynasty which was mercifully for the Tibetans on the decline.

At the first half of the twentieth century, there was no question of social or political reform and religious tradition was even less ready to evolve and adapt to the changing world.

The darkest period for Tibet has certainly been between the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the assumption of responsibility as the temporal and spiritual leader by the Fourteenth. Unfortunately, by this time it was too late and the Chinese Army had begun to 'liberate' Tibet with the dreadful consequences known to all.

The following decades saw the maturing of the leader of the Tibetan nation and under his wise guidance, the shine of the Tibetan foreheads definitively began brightening.

We can only hope that the tide has now turned for good.

However, one question remains. Admitting that Tibet had accumulated a 'Karma' and had to go through a period of 'purification', what about the other nations involved in its recent history? What about China, England or India?

It appears that the time for the Chinese to harvest the fruits of their own Karma is approaching soon, although it is said that, out of compassion, the Dalai Lama⁶¹ is praying to make China's Karma as mild as possible.

⁶¹ The incarnation of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

In a recent interview the Dalai Lama told us about his dream of performing the Kalachakra Initiation on the Tiananmen Square. He told us:

In fact, after the events on Tiananmen Square [in 1989], I felt that one day in the future, I would like to perform one Kalachakra initiation on Tiananmen in order to purify the area and help the people who died. This desire or vision is still there with me.⁶²

This certainly will also be one of the ways to alleviate the karmic consequences of Mao's policies.

Only the future will reveal what the consequences of past actions will be for the Chinese nation, but we should not forget that the Chinese people have already suffered a great deal under a brutal and *adharmic* regime which only desired to spread its ideology and creed over the whole planet.

Since Tibet was 'liberated' in the fifties, China has gone through several horrendous ordeals.⁶³ Today the wheel of time continues to turn and the old regime is struggling for survival. Has the die already been cast against the Chinese nation?

As for England, we do not know if she had gone through any 'karmic' retribution, but she did her share of 'un-righteous' actions with regard to Tibet and India. The Government of His Majesty⁶⁴ was the only government fully aware of the political status of Tibet. Knowing that for all purposes Tibet was an independent nation between 1912 and 1950, White Hall decided to remain as 'vague' as possible for their own selfish purposes, in order to use a weak China as a pawn in their power struggle against the Russian empire in Asia.

⁶² Interview with the author for Rediff.com, March 2001.

⁶³ Particularly during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

⁶⁴ And the British Government of India.

If one looks at today's conflicts in the subcontinent and Central Asia, most of the border disputes have their root in the imperial policies of London.

The physical border demarcation (or the absence of it) in the northern frontiers between India and Sinkiang, between Tibet and Ladakh, the problems related to the McMahon line, the Durant Line cutting into two parts the Pashtoon Land⁶⁵ and several other problems are all the result of the 'imperial' attitude of the British. Does this not constitute a negative Karma?

Similarly, independent India, the defender of the oppressed and colonised people of Asia and Africa, let down her weak but friendly neighbour for the sake of Nehru's utopian friendship with an expansionist China. Twelve years later, in 1962, India paid a heavy price and even today suffers from the absence of a buffer zone between her borders and China.

The Indian leaders also accepted the partition of their nation, conveniently proposed by the British on their way out of their colony. This led to terrible consequences which can be seen today in Kashmir and elsewhere along the Indo-Pakistani border.

Of course, the British could commit these crimes because the Indian subcontinent was weak and the Congress leadership divided on communal lines and practicing an appeasement policy which clearly did not lead anywhere.

Somehow, the petty regional and sectarian quarrels of the Tibetans seem very mild compared to the 'un-righteous' British or Chinese actions, but it is not the place here to analyse this. In this study, we have only tried to look into history in order to understand better the current ordeal of the Tibetan people.

And the words of Sri Aurobindo come back to mind.

⁶⁵ Between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

There are two who are unfit for greatness and freedom,
the man who has never been slave to another
and the nation that has never been under the yoke of the
foreigner.

A small consolation indeed, but if the youth of Tibet is able to learn
the lessons from the past and spring boldly and unitedly forward
toward the future, it would not have been in vain.

Postscript: the Written Fate

The *Bhrigu Samhita*:

Fate is strange. Human beings know very little about their own fate. Why are we pulled one day in a direction and the next day in the opposite?

And what is true for an individual is perhaps all the more true for a nation.

As a poet said:

*Man's hopes and longings build the journeying wheels
That bear the body of his destiny
And lead his blind will towards an unknown goal.
His fate within him shapes his acts and rules;
Its face and form already are born in him,⁶⁶*

We shall narrate a personal story which illustrates how the 'blind will towards an unknown goal' seems sometimes to follow a predetermined pattern. However, instead of answering a question, it seems further to complicate the matter. Is fate already written? Are humans and nations only following an ancient decreed script?

A close relative of mine, a senior army officer in the Indian Army, was posted in 1962, as the Commander Signals in the Corps IV in Tezpur⁶⁷. He was responsible for manning the communications along the border⁶⁸ between Tibet and India.

At the end of October, he decided to personally inspect the different border posts under his command to check on the preparedness of his troops who were responsible for the communications in this very vital sector of the Indo-Tibetan border. Small scale Chinese intrusions had been occurring for a couple of months along the

⁶⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* (Pondicherry, 1972).

⁶⁷ Now Arunachal Pradesh.

⁶⁸ Known as the McMahon Line.

McMahon Line. Although as a senior signal officer, his place was not on the front, he went on his inspection tour and fate took over. On October 19, he reached the Indian army outposts on the Namkha Chu river.

The next morning, in the early hours of that fateful day,⁶⁹ he saw thousands and thousands of Chinese soldiers descending 'like ants' the slopes of the Taghla ridge. A couple of hours later, everything was over, the five bridges on Namkha Chu river had been overrun by Mao's troops.⁷⁰

The officer was taken prisoner along with a few other senior officers and marched to Central Tibet (Yalung Valley) where they were kept for more than six months in a monastery transformed into a PoW camp for the occasion.

After weeks without any news⁷¹, in despair his wife and father decided to consult the *Bhrigu Samhita* of Hoshiarpur in the Punjab. The *Samhita* is a book of prophesy composed by a Rishi named Bhrigu. It was written in ancient Sanskrit on palm leaves supposedly 4000 or 5000 years ago.

Usually, the local Pandit draws up the person's horoscope and then compares it with the thousands of ancient palm leaves available. The difficulty is to find the corresponding horoscope. After two long days of search, the wife and father of my relative finally found his corresponding palm leaf. The details in this '*patra*'⁷² were mind-boggling. It read:

⁶⁹ India has never really recovered from the blow inflicted by Mao on that day.

⁷⁰ Untill the last minute, Krishna Menon, the Indian Defence Minister did not believe that the Chinese *Bhais* would not come to reason and accept India's contention on the border.

⁷¹ The Indian army had reported him missing.

⁷² Sanskrit for palm leaf.

This *patra* belongs to a person with a name starting with letter *Ka* [Krishna] but he will not come for it himself. His father with a name starting with letter *Cha* [Charan] and his wife with a name starting with letter *Ka* [Kamla], will come and they will definitively come, come what may.

[The *patra* goes on giving correctly the exact day and time and positions of the planets at the time the *patra* was being first consulted.]

Then it continues:

Questioners are *Cha* and *Ka*, wife of the son. This man is asking for his son and she for her husband. Both their questions are for the same person. His son is in the midst of very stiff effects, that is what I think and the day of this question is the month of *poh*, 1st dark fortnight and a Wednesday.

For their benefit I am telling you: listen... The son (and the husband) is in a severe task and is in the hand of the enemy. This bad time must end quickly and he will be happy soon. I have said a lot for him already before this help. Hey Shulra, they must be patient

In this time the person they are questioning about is in the Himalgiri in prison with enemy with name starting with *Cha* [China] because in this time he has got to be in the jail in the Himalayas. Very soon he will be made happy and definitively.

Just as steel cuts steel so good deeds cut away bad deeds.

The *patra* continued to give some karmic reasons arising from past lives and offered some cure through offerings, *pujas* and prayers. Eventually, the officer was released in May 1963 after a tour of China, during which the Maoist leadership tried to convince their Indian 'guests' of the great progress made by Red China.

There is no way for us to verify if in this particular case, the actions mentioned in the *patra* really occurred in the past and if the event of

the present life were only the fruits which had ripened at that particular time, but the fact is that there were too many details found correct to be ignored.

Traditionally, it has always been said that it is extremely difficult to escape the results of one's previous actions. For us, the above anecdote brought some light on one point which has often intrigued us: who is responsible for our fate?

In the course of our interviews, the Dalai Lama was always insistent that we should not always look for 'external causes' for the events which befell Tibet after 1950, but also at actions committed by Tibetans themselves. Several times, when we have tried to expound our theory that Nehru was mainly responsible for what has happened to Tibet, however, we were often told that Nehru was just an instrument and if Nehru had not been there someone else would have acted in his place.

We also often thought that *if* Sardar Patel, the Deputy Minister of India had lived a few more years, the Fate of Tibet would have been different, but here again, is it possible to change the destiny of a man (or nation)?

The following story shows that when the dies are cast, even the most desperate attempts are bound to fail. The story involves Sardar Patel who was struggling for his life as well as against Nehru's foreign policy of appeasement towards China. In August 1950, the Sardar was very sick⁷³ and the doctors were not able to diagnose his disease, they could only prescribe rest and a suitable climate.⁷⁴ C.P.N. Singh, the Indian Ambassador to Nepal found a possible solution. He looked for a reputed Tantric practitioner who through occult rituals could help to save the life of the Deputy Prime Minister.

⁷³ He would pass away in December of the same year.

⁷⁴ In Dehra Dun.

When he finally discovered one around August 15, however events took a strange turn. From Kathmandu, C.P.N. Singh wrote a letter to Patel, which is worth quoting:

My Dear Sardar Saheb,

I am grateful to you for your letter which was sent from Dehradun. I had been pursuing Mr. Dutt, the spiritualist and after very vigorous efforts of nearly six weeks I was able to get hold of him on the 15th August. ⁷⁵ I was arranging to send him under proper escort to Delhi. Unfortunately, the same night when the earthquake occurred, the electric lights completely failed and Mr. Dutt in his nervousness to get out of the house, jumped through the window and fell on the stone pavement. He has fractured his heel bones and has sustained injuries at his back. He is, therefore, laid up in bed; and I am taking all possible care to enable him to recover as quick as possible. It is obvious, however, that he will now take some time to recover from the injuries he has sustained; but as soon as he recovers, I shall take immediate steps to dispatch him to Delhi.

It has really given me a shock to find him meet with this accident after all the efforts I had put in to secure him and at a

⁷⁵ On the evening of August 15, 1950, a terrible earthquake shook Tibet. " *This was no ordinary earthquake; it felt like the end of the world,*" writes Robert Ford, the British Radio operator working in Chamdo (Kham). "Mountains and valleys exchanged places in an instant, hundreds of villages were swallowed up, the Brahmaputra River was completely rerouted and for hours afterwards, the sky over the south-eastern Tibet glowed with an infernal red light, diffused with the pungent scent of sulphur."

The Dalai Lama himself who was just fifteen year-old wrote on the ominous earthquake: "It was like an artillery barrage – which is what we assumed to be the cause of both the tremors and the noise: a test of some sort being carried out by the Tibetan army...Some people reported seeing a strange red glow in the skies in the direction from which the noise came..."

time when I was arranging to send him to Delhi. I do not wish to relate the story of how it was ultimately possible to catch him as that is a long chapter and may unnecessarily take your most precious time which is so valuable to all of us.

Trusting God has enabled you to keep fit and work for us. ⁷⁶

Perhaps Patel, Tibet (and India) no longer had the choice to avoid the devastating avalanche. As for the Tibetan nation, it had to go through the ordeal with only one hope — that it would not be too painful and long?

The karmic accumulation were such that nothing, not even the most knowledgeable Tantric was able to stop the Karmic train.

Of course, the Tantric never reached India and Patel passed away in December.

India would be the first to suffer from the departure of the Iron Man of India and Tibet would lose its freedom in October of the same year.

To conclude the anecdote in a lighter vein, we have to mention Patel's answer to C.P.N. Singh. The Sardar wrote on August 29:

I am sorry that the spiritualist could not foresee the earthquake, or the accident which happened to him; probably, had no time to consult the other world.

I am really sorry however that he met with this accident. I hope he is improving.

With kind regards,

Vallabhbhai Patel

Even if the 'other world ' had been consulted, it would have probably confirmed that it was too late for Tibet and as Bhṛigu puts it: "Just as steel cuts steel so good deeds cut away bad deeds."

It is indeed difficult to find a short cut with Karma.

⁷⁶ Chopra, P.N., *The Collected Works of Sardar Patel*, Vol. XV, p. 200.

This is why we have dedicated this study to the youth of Tibet. It is up to them to build a new and free Tibet by following the highest Dharma and adapting it to today's age.