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Non-violence: Theory and Practice in Tibet

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Abstract: Human beings by nature wish for happiness and do not want any suffering. We sometimes quarrel with each other, sometimes criticise and sometimes fight but as a whole, we are all the same human beings. From a broader viewpoint, we are all brothers and sisters. Clearly, the Dalai Lama has acknowledged the influence of Gandhi on his way of thinking. Nobel Peace Prize winner the Dalai Lama stands alongside Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Aung San Suu Kyi and Nelson Mandela in the international struggle for freedom and human rights for the past twenty years and he has been the voice for democracy in Tibet.

Keywords: Non-violence, Peace, Transition, Avalokiteshvara, Consciousness

Introduction

The Dalai Lama is the highest-ranking lama of Tibetan Buddhism. Since the 17th century, the Dalai Lama has been the political and spiritual leader of Tibet. He is also considered an emanation of the Bodhisattva *Avalokiteshvara*, an iconic figure who represents boundless compassion. The term 'Dalai Lama' takes on different meanings according to different people. For some this term signifies a living Buddha, the earthly manifestation of *Avalokiteshvara*, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. For others, it means a 'God-King'.

Each Dalai Lama is recognized as the reincarnation of the previous Dalai Lama. This does not mean, however, that a Dalai Lama's soul has transmigrated from one body to another through the centuries. According to the age-old spiritual tradition, the Regent and the Tibetan government consulted oracles and Lamas for signs and clues of where the next Dalai Lama would be born. Buddhists, including Tibetan Buddhists, understand that an individual has no intrinsic self, or soul, to transmigrate. It's a bit closer to a Buddhist understanding to say that the

great compassion and dedicated vows of each Dalai Lama causes the next one to be born. The new Dalai Lama is not the same person as the previous one, but neither he is a different person. The Dalai Lama is the incarnation of Chenrezig who is the Buddha of Compassion.

Buddhism and its History in Tibet

The Marxist view is that man is ultimately responsible for his own destiny and this reflects Buddhists thought as well. Buddhism in the Tibetan tradition is a very complete form of Buddhism. Tibet required peaceful relations with their neighbour. Dalai Lama's claim was that Tibet had never been part of China. They are ethnically and racially distinct peoples. Neither they speak the same language nor their script anything is like the Chinese script. The difference between Tibet and China was that to one the killing of human beings was a fact of life and to the other it was unthinkable. It made him realise that the Chinese leadership was not truly Marxist dedicated to a better world for all, but highly nationalistic.

According to Buddhist thought, a Bodhisattva is someone on the path to Buddhahood who dedicates themselves entirely to helping all other sentient beings towards release from suffering. The word Bodhisattva can best be understood by translating the Bodhi and Sattva separately: Bodhi means the understanding or wisdom of the ultimate nature of reality, and a Sattva is someone who is motivated by universal compassion. The Bodhisattva ideal is thus the aspiration to practise infinite compassion with infinite wisdom. (Lama 1998: 224-25)

Buddhism was introduced to Tibet during the fourth century AD. Tibetans are by nature quite aggressive people and quite warlike, their increasing interest in religious practice was a major factor in bringing about the country's isolation. Before then, Tibet possessed a vast empire, which dominated Central Asia with territories covering large parts of northern India, Nepal and Bhutan in the south. It also included much Chinese territory. In 763 AD, Tibetan forces actually captured the Chinese capital, where they extracted promises of tribute and other concessions. However, as Tibetans' enthusiasm for Buddhism increased, Tibet's relations with her neighbours became of a spiritual rather than a political nature. This was especially true of China, where a 'priest-patron' relationship developed. The Manchu Emperors, who were Buddhists, referred to the Dalai Lama as 'King of Expounding Buddhism'.

The fundamental precept of Buddhism is Interdependence or the Law of Cause and Effect. This simply states that everything which an individual being experiences is derived through action from motivation. Motivation is thus the root of both action and experience. From this understanding are derived from the Buddhist theories of consciousness and rebirth.

Buddhists further believe that the basic nature of consciousness is neutral. It is possible to escape from the unending cycle of birth, suffering, death and rebirth that life inevitably entails, but only when all negative karma has been eliminated along with all worldly attachments. When this point is reached, the consciousness in question is believed to attain the first liberation and then ultimately Buddhahood. However, according to Buddhism in the Tibetan tradition, a being that achieves Buddhahood, although freed from samsara, 'the wheel of suffering', as the phenomenon of existence is known, will continue to return to work for the benefit of all other sentient beings until such time as each one is similarly liberated.

Influence of Gandhi's Non-Violence on Dalai Lama

The recent Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso is the 14th Dalai Lama and he fled Tibet on 31st March 1959. Since then he has been living in exile in India. During the period 1949-50, the People's Republic of China sent an army to invade Tibet. For almost a decade Dalai Lama remained as political as well as the spiritual leader of Tibetan people and he tried to re-establish peaceful relations between the two nations Tibet and China. But the task proved impossible and he came to the unhappy conclusion that he could serve his people better from outside.

In November 1950, with Chinese forces entering Tibet, the Government of Tibet in Lhasa sent an urgent appeal for support to the United Nations. Even though, a series of embassy efforts the appeal but was fruitless. Tibetans had no alternative but to enter into direct negotiations with the Chinese authorities. The delegation was instructed to consult with the Kashag and the Dalai Lama before concluding any agreement with the Chinese authorities. On April 29, 1951, the Tibetan and Chinese delegations met at an army headquarters in Beijing. As negotiations proceeded, it became increasingly clear that the Chinese would not agree to any of the Tibetan demands. All negotiating positions put forward by the Tibetan delegation were rejected and delegates were threatened with physical violence and kept virtual prisoners by their Chinese hosts. Furthermore, the Tibetan negotiators were not given

permission to contact the Kashag in Lhasa, nor the Dalai Lama who was stationed temporarily in Dromo. Instead, they were required to obey the Chinese position. Following days of debate characterized by continuous compromise by the Tibetan delegation, the agreement was finally concluded. It guaranteed, among other things, that the existing political system in Tibet would be maintained and that the authority of the Dalai Lama would not be challenged. Final copies of the agreement were signed by both delegations on May 23, 1951, but without receiving approval from the Kashag and the Dalai Lama. Before the Kashag and Dalai Lama were told of the agreement, Chinese officials announced 'the peaceful liberation' of Tibet on April 27, 1951. The Dalai Lama describes his initial reaction to the announcement as a 'terrible shock'. When the officials arrived in Dromo, they were accompanied by Chinese General Zhang Jingwu who managed to convince the Dalai Lama that re-negotiation of the agreement would be difficult now, but possible at a later date. On this premise, the young Dalai Lama decided to return to Lhasa with his ministers where he was immediately faced with an escalation of Chinese military presence. By September 1951, 3000 troops were stationed in Lhasa and that number quickly increased to 20,000.

In April 1954, Nehru had signed a new Sino-Indian treaty which included a memorandum known as Panch Sheel, Whereby it was agreed that India and China would under no circumstances interfere with one another's internal affairs. According to this treaty, Tibet was part of China. (Lama 1998: 113)

Only after he had arrived safely into exile in India the Dalai Lama was free to repudiate the Seventeen Point Agreement. At a press conference in Mussoorie, India on June 20, 1959, the Dalai Lama said, the approval of the Tibetan Government was secured under compulsion and at the point of the bayonet. The representatives were compelled to sign the agreement under threat of further military operations against Tibet by the invading armies of China leading to utter ruin of the country.

On April 24th, 1959, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru came to see Dalai Lama in Mussoorie. The Dalai Lama made it clear that he can't ever accept violence. He told Nehru that his main concern was twofold: "I am determined to regain Tibet's independence, but for now, my priority is to put an end to the bloodbath. At these words, Nehru

told that is not possible, you say that you want independence and at the same time that you don't want a bloodbath. Impossible! (Lama 2010: 183)

When Dalai Lama was studying Buddhism, he was taught to take care of nature, since the practice of non-violence applies not just to human beings but to all sentient beings.

Everything that is animate possesses consciousness. Wherever there is consciousness, there are feelings like pain, pleasure and joy. No sentient being wanted to suffer. On the contrary, all beings search for happiness. In Buddhist practice, we are so used to this idea of non-violence and to the wish to put an end to all suffering that we are careful not to attack or destroy life unwillingly. (Lama 2010: 135)

In 1956 when Dalai Lama visited Delhi, he made a pilgrimage to Rajghat on the banks of the Jamuna river where Mahatma Gandhi was cremated. He felt very grateful to be there and grateful also to be in the country that had adopted *ahimsā*, the Mahatma's doctrine of non-violence. When he stood praying, he experienced simultaneously great sadness at not being able to meet Gandhi in person and great joy at the magnificent example of his life. To him, he was and is the consummate politician, a man who put his belief in altruism above any personal considerations. He was convinced too that his devotion to the cause of non-violence was the only way to conduct politics.

Dalai Lama's View on Non-Violence

Unfortunately, although we have entered the twenty-first century, we have not made a clean break with past habits. I refer to the belief that we can solve problems with weapons. It is because of this idea that the world continues to experience all sorts of difficulties. But what should we do? What is to be done when the major world powers have already made their decisions? We can wish for a gradual end to the tradition of wars? (Lama 2010: 115)

Human rights violations in Tibet are amongst the most serious problems in the world. With a thousand million people against Tibetan's six million, China could forcefully erase the entire Tibetan race from the face of the earth. Learning to forgive is much more useful than merely picking up a stone and throwing it at the object of one's anger, the more so when the provocation is extreme.

In the history books, we learn that one nation wins a war while another loses it. Over the centuries, conflicts have succeeded each other, showing how true it is that no war that has ever been won has signified the end of the war. Quite the contrary confrontation continues from generation to generation and the parties that capitulated yesterday hope to become the conquerors of tomorrow. What if the Dalai Lama's commitment were precise to break this cycle of conflict? From that point of view, the fifty years that have passed would be neither pointless nor lost. On the contrary, they would represent victory over war. (Lama 2010: 263)

Westerners view is that in the long run the non-violent methods of passive resistance advocated by Gandhi are not suitable for everyone and that they are more appropriate in the East. Being more energetic, Westerners expect immediate results, whatever the situation, even at the cost of their lives.

I think this attitude is not always the best one. On the contrary, the practice of non-violence is beneficial in every case. It simply requires determination. Even though the liberation movements in Eastern Europe quickly attained their goal, nonviolent protest, by its very nature, usually requires patience. (Lama 2010: 195)

Human beings have the desire for peace, they all want to avoid suffering and be happy. On 21st September 1987 before the Human Rights Commission in the Congress in Washington, Dalai Lama announced a Five-Point Peace Plan in which he called for the transformation of Tibet into a zone of peace, a sanctuary where humanity and nature could live together in harmony. It encompasses the following points:

- i. The transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace.
- ii. Abandonment of China's population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people.
- iii. Respect for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms.
- iv. Restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment and the abandonment of China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste.
- v. Commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and of relations between Tibetan and Chinese peoples.

Dalai Lama's aim of the Five-Point Peace Plan was that the whole of Tibet, including the eastern provinces of Kham and Amdo, be transformed into a zone of *Ahimsā* in keeping with Tibet's position as a peaceful Buddhist nation. The following are key elements of the proposed Zone of *Ahimsā*

- i. The entire Tibetan plateau would be demilitarised.
- ii. The manufacture, testing and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and other armaments on the Tibetan plateau would be prohibited.
- iii. The Tibetan plateau would be transformed into the world's largest natural park or biosphere. Strict laws would be enforced to protect wildlife and plant life; the exploitation of natural resources would be carefully regulated so as not to damage relevant ecosystems and a policy of sustainable development would be adopted in populated areas.
- iv. The manufacture and use of nuclear power and other technologies which produce hazardous waste would be prohibited.
- v. National resources and policy would be directed towards the active promotion of peace and environmental protection. Organisations dedicated to the furtherance of peace and to the protection of all forms of life would find a hospitable home in Tibet.
- vi. The establishment of international and regional organisations for the promotion and protection of human rights would be encouraged in Tibet.

Non-violence is not limited to an absence of violence, for it is a matter of an active attitude, motivated by the wish to do others good. It is equivalent to altruism. (Dalai Lama 2010: 107)

So, even though it is difficult to bring about positive change in society itself, it is undoubtedly worthwhile to try. We cannot solve human problems with weapons. Obviously, wars produce conquerors and conquered, but only temporarily. The victories from wars cannot last very long. As Dalai Lama said:

I am quite certain that because of my commitment to non-violence, based on a genuine desire for universal brotherhood and sisterhood, there have been some positive results, however slight. (Lama 1998: 300)

Dalai Lama's point of view is that from a strictly practical standpoint, we note that violence can sometimes be useful. A problem is resolved more quickly by force. But such a success is often obtained at the expense of the rights and well being of others. Any problem resolved

that way engenders yet another problem. Once Chinese Chairman Mao said that political power comes from the barrel of a gun. At this Dalai Lama supposed that he was only partly right: power that comes from the barrel of a gun can be effective only for a short time. In the end, people's love for truth, justice, freedom and democracy will triumph. No matter what governments do, the human spirit will always prevail.

Dalai Lama and Gandhi: On Transition

It is often noticed that decisions made out of desperation often go wrong. Therefore, rather than make decisions based on emotion, we need to analyse carefully and make them according to their reality. The main problems we confront today are created by us, whether they are violent conflicts, destruction of nature, poverty, hunger and forth.

They can be resolved but only through human effort, understanding and the development of a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. To do this, we need to cultivate a universal responsibility for one another and for the planet we share, based on a good heart and awareness. (Lama 1998: 298)

If there is bloodshed, the man in power will have safe shelters, they will flee the painful penalty by finding asylum. But what will happen to the poor people, the children, the old and the sick? They are the ones who will have to abide the brunt. When weapons speak, they create death and destruction without distinguishing between the innocent and the guilty. The missile launched by the enemy does not respect the innocent, the poor, the defenceless the very people deserving of compassion. Consequently, the real losers are the ones who lead a simple life.

When the Dalai Lama is reproached for limiting Gandhi's inheritance to non-violence, he points out that the context doesn't allow them to reproduce in Tibet the methods that freed India from British control. Gandhi could, in fact, defend himself freely in a court of law and although the colonial regime of the British Raj was severe, it still respected the basic rights of individuals, which is not the case with the Chinese authorities. Therefore, the Dalai Lama advocates cultivating the spirit of Gandhi's struggle while adapting it to the Tibetan situation. (Lama 2010: 196)

Gandhi is the political figure for non-violent struggle and his portrait is present in many Tibetan administrative offices. A great model of peace and reconciliation, the Mahatma was honoured posthumously at the same time as the Dalai Lama during the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize. By doing so, the Nobel committee meant to repair its mistake in not having conferred this distinction on him before.

To prevail over India's independence from British colonial power, Gandhi organized not only just non-violent resistance but also civil disobedience, non-cooperation with the occupiers and protest marches. When the Dalai Lama is reproached for limiting Gandhi's inheritance to non-violence, he points out that the context does not allow them to reproduce in Tibet the methods that freed India from British control. Gandhi could, in fact, defend himself freely in a court of law and although the colonial regime of the British Raj was severe, it still respected the basic rights of individuals, which is not the case with the Chinese authorities. Therefore, the Dalai Lama advocates cultivating the spirit of Gandhi's struggle while adapting it to the Tibetan situation.

There is the need to have international cooperation without any difference on the grounds of geographical, political, economic and cultural matters. The spirit of love and brotherhood animating from non-violence has to be approved to the international level. The international problems have to be sorted out, discussed and solved in good faith by assuming the method of persuasion, negotiation, adjustment and compromise without resorting to violence, by being rational and moral. By being integrated, the fear of unseen hazard arising out of division could completely be avoided.

In 1989, Dalai Lama owns the Nobel Prize for Peace but the news didn't matter to him much because he realised that it would mean a great deal to the people of Tibet, for it was they who were the real winners of the prize. His satisfaction derived from what he has seen as international recognition of the value of compassion, forgiveness and love. He was pleased by feeling that at that moment the people of many countries were discovering for themselves that peaceful change was not impossible.

In the past, the idea of non-violent revolution had seemed perhaps idealistic and I drew great comfort from this overwhelming proof to the contrary. (Lama 1998: 289-90)

Peace, in the sense of the absence of war, is of little value to someone who is dying of hunger or cold. It will not remove the pain of

torture inflicted on a prisoner of conscience. It does not comfort those who have lost their loved ones in floods caused by senseless deforestation in a neighbouring country. Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free. True peace with oneself and with the world around us can only be achieved through the development of mental peace. The other phenomena mentioned above are similarly interrelated.

Thus, for example, we see that a clean environment, wealth or democracy means little in the face of war, especially nuclear war and that material development is not sufficient to ensure human happiness. Material progress is, of course, important for human advancement. Inner peace is the key: if you have inner peace, the external problems do not affect your deep sense of peace and tranquillity. In that state of mind, you can deal with situations with calmness and reason while keeping your inner happiness. That is very important. Without this inner peace, no matter how comfortable your life is material, you may still be worried, disturbed or unhappy because of circumstances. (Nobel peace prize speech of the Dalai Lama)

The Dalai Lama's award of Nobel Peace Prize brought a deserved recognition of Tibetan's struggle for freedom and justice. It reaffirmed their conviction that with the weapons of truth, courage and determination they will succeed at freeing their country.

So although it is difficult to bring about positive change in society itself, it is undoubtedly worthwhile to try. It is possible. This is my firm belief. Whether or not we succeed is a different matter: what is important is that we do our best. (Lama 1998: 299)

The Dalai Lama is active in spreading India's message of non-violence and religious harmony throughout the world. He has said that democracy has deep roots in India. He considers India the master and Tibet its disciple, scholars like Nagarjuna went from Nalanda to Tibet to spread Buddhism in the eighth century. He has noted that millions of people lost their lives in violence in the 20th century, so let the 21st century be a century of tolerance and dialogue.

The discourse on the Tibetan cause itself has taken a turn and the Tibetan imagination is now linking the Gandhian concept of non-violence vis-a-vis Tibet with international values, like human rights and environmental consciousness and with Buddhism. (Puri 2002: 3500-3503)

Both Gandhi and Dalai Lama balanced their responsibilities as spiritual and political leaders. Gandhi supported the struggle for independence. He was, however, disillusioned by the form in which independence ultimately came and the violence it produced. The Dalai Lama has perceived that balance differently, removing himself from day-to-day nationalist politics and showing equanimity. For Gandhi politics cannot be separated from religion. Religion signifies a man's social contact. True religion is one's attitude to social service and upliftment of the poor and suffering millions.

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