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International Conference “Exploring Tibet’s History and Culture” (19-21 November 2009, University of Delhi, India) followed by the Interview with His Holiness the Dalai-Lama, (November 21, 2009, Delhi)

The International Conference “**Exploring Tibet’s History and Culture**” was held last year from 19th to 21st November hosted by University of Delhi. The conference was organised jointly by the University of Delhi and the Central University for Tibetan Studies Sarnath, in Varanasi, India and gathered young researchers and renowned specialists on Tibetan studies from all over the world. Different aspects related to history, religion and culture of Tibet were intensively discussed during three rich days of the conference.

Conference

The diversity of a historical perspective and the thematic spectrum varied greatly – for example, from very interesting communication by the prominent specialist in the field Professor Jose Ignacio Cabezon’ from University of California on “*The Science of Dreams in Tibetan Buddhism*” to politically appealing paper by young and quite renown British-Indian researcher Dibyesh Anand “*What Makes an Invasion Foreign? The Legacy of British India in Shaping Modern Tibet’s Geopolitical Identity*”. It is always fascinating to get to know the specific features and phenomena of ancient cultures, as it was the case of the communication on “*Early Tibetan Literary Sources*” by John Vincent Belezza, senior research fellow in University of Virginia, who lives since a long time in Dharamsala, India, and explores the ancient archaeological sites of Tibet; or as well an eminent specialist on both Chinese and Tibetan studies Dr. Bianca Horlemann from Berlin University: she presented a paper on “*Tibetan Nomadic Trade and the Chinese “xiejia (hostel)” System in 19th/20th Century in Amdo*”.



Besides, I would like to mention here such illustrious scholars on Tibetan studies as Professors Vladimir Uspenskiy from St-Petersburg State University, Russia, Pr. Robert Barnett from Columbia University, USA, and Pr. Eliot Sperling from Bloomington, Indiana University, USA, as well as specialist on medieval history of Tibet Dr. David Templeman of MONASH University, Australia, or as well research fellows from Ulan-Ude, Buriyatia, Russia, - Dr. Irina Garry and Dr. Nikolay Tsyrempilov – whose insightful participation increased greatly the academic and intellectual dimension of this international event and made it incredibly appealing.

Professor David Germano from U of Virginia along with his very interesting text on *“Tibet and her Cosmic Neighbours: The Penetrating Sound Tantra and Narratives of Other Worlds in Early Medieval Tibetan Cosmologies”* presented as a special event: *The digital Tibetan-Himalayan Library* – technologically extremely advanced project that is now under its ultimate stage by the group of researchers on Tibet and software engineers. In future it will permit to find through the Internet link all possible information and multi-media materials related to different aspects of the Tibetan heritage.

The subject of my communication was related to some questions of ancient connections between Central Asia and Tibet. More exactly, it was a historiographical overview of divers sources – of archaeological, epigraphical, textual, but as well ethno-anthropological and philosophical origin – found on the territory of Kyrgyzstan or observed in the traditional Kyrgyz culture, that point to the ancient relations and communications (especially through the “common ground” of Buddhism) existing between two parts of Central Asia – Kyrgyzstan and Tibet. As I was said, this paper acquired quite an interest among the participants and organisers, because of several reasons; one of them - that apart archaeology, very few researches on the relations between Central Asian region in general, and Kyrgyzstan in particular, and Tibet were done lately, it still stays as an unexplored field which requires the comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach. I definitely would like to share that paper with the readers of the *AUCA Academic Review* in later issues.

Cup of Tea with Dalai Lama

However, today let me present on these pages the interview with the spiritual and political leader of Tibetan people His Holiness Dalai Lama the 14th, whom I had an immense honour to meet during the conference. Since a long time I cherished this idea - to make an interview with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, - and knowing that he will present a special Chief Guest Address during a Valedictory session of our conference, I solicited a couple months beforehand the Tibetan bureau in Delhi. Apparently, it was too short notice and first, I was informed it's impossible (due to an incredibly busy agenda of HHDL). But upon my arrival to Delhi I have got good news – we could meet the last day of conference for a short (30 minutes) interview... Needless to say, how happy I was! We went to the meeting together with my father, writer Kubatbek Jusubaliev, who was invited to the conference as well, as a writer and journalist, and talked on the great significance of the *“Bardo Thodol”* – The Tibetan Book of Death. Because of a short timing I was advised to prepare only few questions, and some answers I got through additional documentation, books and e-mail. Finally, I had asked directly several questions and, as well as my father had a very interesting and intense exchange with His Holiness. And, at last, we were invited by His Holiness to visit his residence in Dharamsala to share a cup of a special Tibetan tea, which is actually the same type of drink as the traditional Kyrgyz salted tea

that the shepherds drink on the high “djailoo”- pastures of Tian-Shan and Pamir mountains! “Tibetan tea party” happened one week later and it was another blessing!

Though before giving the full text of the interview let me present here a passage on Tibet written by the organisers – I found this short text as a perfect introduction - poetic and engaging, - to the further discussion.

Land of Mysticism

“Tibet, the roof of the world is raised above the ordinary dwelling lands of the human race, higher still are the mountain masses that fence it off from neighbouring nations and has ever fascinated the imagination of mankind. Tibet came to be known to the western world in early 20th century as a ‘land of mysticism’. The natural difficulties of entering Tibet and of travelling in its bleak uplands have added the spirit of seclusion which has moved its Government to keep foreigners out of their sacred land.

Tibet, thus standing alone, differs greatly from her neighbours. Tibet differs not only in its geographical features, but also in its Government and people, in the language and folklore, religious custom, history and culture and all that goes to make up the life of the nation. The history and culture of Tibet is to an extent hardly equalled in any other part of the Earth.

Tibet, though inaccessible has appealed alike to the explorers and modern tourists who have found in it an opportunity for exploration of Tibet’s unique cultural values, and to the Hindu devotee, who finds holy places such as **Mount Kailash** and **Manasarovara Lake** as the source of the **Indus, Sutlej, Brahmaputra**, and other great rivers that rise from Tibet and flow through India. Tibet is described in ancient Indian classical literature as a **Trivistapa**, the heavenly abode of Lord Indra. To India a deep political interest is also added, for Tibet stretches for 4000 km along the northern frontier of India, twice as far as any other border country.

The one aspect of Tibet’s national character that has most influenced and dominated the thoughts and action of every Tibetan is the devotion to the Buddhist faith and culture, particularly the Mahayana school of Buddhism introduced in Tibet by **King Songtsen Gampo** (617-650) in 7th century. The first Buddhist temples were built at that time by the Nepalese and Chinese Princesses, who came to the Tibetan court. Buddhism gradually displaced the former indigenous religion, called Bon, and in doing so absorbed or made submissive to itself, some Bon practices. The neighbouring civilisation, of course had its effect on Tibetan culture and life. That of China and Mongolia can be seen in external features such as food and dress respectively and that of India in religious and moral ideas and literary models. The neighbouring countries, particularly by India, Nepal and China contributed influences on Tibetan culture, but whatever was borrowed from outside was adapted to suit local conditions and the native Tibetan character and mentality.

Tibetans maintained unbroken cultural interactions with India since from 7th century. As a result of which, the Tibetans have produced the largest number of translations of Indian literature. Tibetan **Tripitaka**, known as **Kagyur** and **Tangyur** preserves over five thousand titles translated from Indian languages, mainly from Sanskrit, embracing treatises on grammar, poetry, rhetoric, logic, politics and social ethics, medicine, astrology, chemistry, art and iconography, biographies of saints and of course, Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy. Most of the above mentioned Indian literatures lost in its original form can be reconstructed from its Tibetan translation.

Tibet was a buffer State between the two giant Asian nations i.e. India and China until it came under Chinese occupation in 1951. The political history and status of Tibet is interpreted in different ways by the Tibetans and Western writers, even the Chinese writers before the

fall of Manchu dynasty in 1912 and those of recent Chinese writers after the fall of Manchu dynasty. Ironically, the Tibetan studies have become equally important and popular as of other civilizations of the world in the last three decades”.

Interview

We were waiting in the lobby of the Hotel, where His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his aides were hosted during their Delhi trip. His Holiness first came out from his room to welcome us. Smiling, in excellent mood, His Holiness, to our great surprise, was wearing the Kyrgyz national hat - KALPAK- and immediately took the initiative in greetings: ***“I WOULD LIKE TO WELCOME YOU WITH THIS HAT!”*** We were so touched and pleased by His Holiness’ humanly warmth and heartedness; I felt his powerful charisma was a rare combination of a gentle simplicity, an intense personality and serenity. After the introductions, giving presents, a few photos, and a nice chat on the exquisiteness of our national hat and well-doing qualities of the felt in general, we started our interview.

1. Your Holiness, since several decades Tibetan people is passing through troubled and tough period, involved in a very difficult relation with China, and this fact created feelings of hatred among some Tibetans toward the Chinese people. However, it is not at all compatible with the Tibetan original Buddhist culture – which is an example of compassion and non-violence. How do You handle this uneasy situation?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama (HHDL): We always appeal to the Tibetan people to act with a non-violence. Despite the sufferings and difficulties, we should not develop hatred towards our Chinese sisters and brothers. And with that we must dedicate ourselves to non-violence for a few reasons. First, because the Tibetan Buddhist culture is the culture of compassion, culture of non-violence. We must preserve our own culture. Then, secondly, the violent methods always bring the negative side effects. Whether we like it or not we should leave side by side with our Han brothers and sisters. So, therefore, if we involve violence then, the consequences among the Han people are very negative. So therefore, for the long term interest, we must carry our struggle to non-violence and without losing compassion towards our Han brothers and sisters. Since last year crisis, I appeal to the Chinese people and government but as well to the Tibetan people. And also I am explaining to Tibetans why we getting quite a strong support from the rest of the world: one of the reasons that we totally dedicate ourselves to non-violence.

Third, compassion and non-violence are important in a long term. We should carry our struggle without any hatred... We must keep our struggle as a non-violent. We should look to the future. And in the future the political sovereignty for Tibet is not so important. The important thing is the common economic interest... Tibet is a backward nation, I mean, materially. Economically it is a very poor nation. Therefore we should remain with People’s Republic of China, from where we can get a material benefit. But, they should provide us **the meaningful autonomy**. It is a safeguard of our language, of our culture, our particular culture. And also, the Tibetan ecology is something very delicate, important, and in danger. We must take a full responsibility for the protection of the environment.

2. How do you manage to keep the cultural entity of Tibetan people in exile?

HHDL: Now to ask about the preservation a Tibetan culture and the very identity of Tibetan people – is to face difficulties. Because of the attitude of some Chinese politicians - hard liners. In their eye, Tibetan heritage, Tibetan unique culture, Tibetan language, and Tibetan unique faith are seen as a source of the threat – of Tibet being separate from mainland China. So, they deliberately try to minimise these things. Therefore, the hostilities are immense. So difficult, there is no freedom inside Tibet. Now, here outside the refugee community we carry all sort of different works regarding preservation of the Tibetan culture, Tibetan language, Tibetan Buddhist studies, that we carry continuously in India, in full freedom, and having a help from the Indian government and also from the numerous NGOs...

3. In the curriculum of the “Introduction to Philosophy” that I teach in AUCA, there is a part on Buddhist philosophy. While learning with interest, students often ask whether it is possible to follow the eight-fold path without pulling out of the active social life (especially the last three steps)...

HHDL: If people practice the eight-fold path without leaving society, it is possible! That means simple things: it means telling truth – do not tell lies, do not steal, do not kill, that is it! And of course your life-style should be contented, not too much luxuries, and, of course, you should have the right view! That means you must be **realistic**. You must know the reality! For example, I think as well the politicians should always tell truth, not tell hypocrisy... Not exaggerating...

Oh, it seems not possible for the politicians...

I think they should change! Usually people call it even “dirty politics”. So now young generations, should change this “dirty politics”! Or transform it into the honest politics, truthful politics. Otherwise the innocent people suffer in hands of the few wicked people.

4. What should be the attitude of the students towards the acquiring knowledge?

HHDL: I think they should take the initiative and make some effort. In general, when we acquire knowledge, there are three levels of processes: hearing, thinking, and then meditation. So, mere hearing and the knowledge that comes from just hearing is very shallow. One has to think for oneself and, if possible, experiment, make further investigations, analyze further. In that way, you gain a deeper awareness. Then your knowledge is more profound and, eventually, can be transformed into action...

5. Is the theory of karma valid? Is all that happens predetermined?

HHDL: Karma does not have the connotation of “predetermined”. By depending on different levels of actions, one can change the course of one’s experience of life. I’m giving the example from our daily life: in the morning, you plan something, you want to take a certain action, maybe carry out plans that were fixed last week, but then some emergency occurs, and everything changes. Although the result of a certain action is programmed, if some more forceful action comes, the result will change.

6. Is there any possibility of a global religion for all the people of the world?

HHDL: No, it is not possible. I think a “global religion” could mean warm human hearts, affection, a sense of caring, and altruistic minds. This could be a global religion. Other than that I see just remaining of the different traditions. They are useful for such a wide variety of humanity. Just one religion... I don't think there is much benefit in that.

7. Now I would like to ask you one peculiar may be naive question... Does the Shambala, the country of the eternal people exist?

HHDL: *Shambala!* I personally convinced it exists but not in this planet. If we try to find on our planet (*takes the Kyrgyz topu that we offered His Holiness, and points on it*) we cannot, look! At the same time, if we totally deny the existence of this country – neither is possible. Because, it is important for the *Tantriana*, like *Kalachakra*... there mentioned the country of *Shambala*. So, there – may be. But still... Mysterious land. (*Laughing*).

Maybe it's a secret question?

No, I mean, really mysterious: we cannot deny its existence totally. But from the other side, we cannot see it physically on this planet. In the past, some Tibetans believed that it existed somewhere to the North, in Siberia for example. But now it is quite clear, that *Shambala* doesn't exist there. (*Laughing*).

So maybe it is still somewhere in Tibet?

You see, in our tradition we do not consider that the *Shambala* is situated within Tibet. Some westerners give the name *Shangri-La*. But in our literature it is not recognised as being in Tibet. It was believed beyond the Tibet, somewhere in the North. It is a transcendental place. It is transcendental to Tibet...



8. What would be your wishes to the Kyrgyz people?

HHDL: From one hand, the Kyrgyz nation is very ancient people, from another is very young. I mean the independent Kyrgyzstan is very young. Certain changes from Soviet Union period brought a little bit a chaos... Last fifty years in exile we, Tibetans, had learned such important things – determination, enthusiasm, and realistic view, and we did work hard. So people of Kyrgyzstan should not discourage themselves and not feel much frustration. Without losing the hope and self-confidence, just work hard. Sometimes it is necessary to have more patience. So, I wish to keep the hope, to be patient and enthusiastic, determined, and what is very important – keep a realistic view!

PS: “Cultivate compassion!”

While preparing the publication, we have learned that His Holiness visited the USA. Media reported that “...the President Barack Obama cancelled the meeting with the Dalai Lama in Washington to “keep China happy”. But, apart the political concerns, there are some more significant ideas for the condition of today’s world that His Holiness expressed in his public speech in California. Here is an excerpt from the American press:

*“In his address, His Holiness said the 20th century was a crucial century for human history. In the 20th century, people created wonderful technology and human society became very advanced in some ways but on the other hand, over 200 million people were killed in this century. “In ancient times,” His Holiness said, “destruction of your enemy meant victory for yourself.” Now it’s different; the destruction of your enemy is the destruction of yourself. His Holiness stated that therefore disarmament was very important. He made a distinction between two types of disarmament: external and internal. His Holiness said, “Without internal disarmament, change is not lasting. Therefore, **cultivate compassion.**”*

His Holiness particularly emphasized the “role of education in developing compassion so that intellectual development is concurrent with moral development”. His Holiness urged that children should be taught the value of compassion when they are small. His Holiness said that Tibetan parents teach their children not to kill insects and the children grow up to value all life. If children do not value insect life, that can be a slippery slope to devaluing all life. His Holiness also pointed out that compassion reduces blood pressure, tension and stress, and induces sound sleep and good digestion. His Holiness said, “The real healing power is compassion.”