

The Kalchakra Pooja at Bodh Gaya

Spiritualism and Nationalism

By Assoc. Prof. Manish Sinha

THE KALCHAKRA POOJA is supposed to be the most advanced form of Vajrayana practice and is one of the most complex systems in Tantric Buddhism. The present Dalai Lama, the fourteenth is the most prominent Kalchakra lineage holder alive today and has given over thirty Kalchakra initiations all over the world. 'Presented as 'Kalchakra for World Peace', they attract hundreds of thousands of devotees from all over the world. Kalchakra means Time Wheel derived from Kala in Sanskrit meaning time and Chakra meaning cycle. The Pooja revolves around the concept of time and cycles, from the cycles of the planets, to the cycles of our breath, and the practice of controlling the most subtle energies within the body on the path to enlightenment. It is said that the Kalchakra Pooja was taught by the Buddha himself and was later brought to Tibet by King Suchandra. The Kalchakra Pooja conducted by the present Dalai Lama at Bodh Gaya between 31 December 2011 and 10 January 2012 was the thirty third initiation given by him. It was a mega international event attracting more than 3 lakh devotees from all over the world. The Tibetan Diaspora living in exile in India and elsewhere, and

thousands of Tibetans from mainland Tibet and China (who crossed into India giving the Chinese authorities a slip) converged at Bodh Gaya. Apart from spirituality it provided them with a unique opportunity for cultural and social mobilization and most importantly to gather support and create awareness for the movement for Tibetan independence or autonomy.

The Tibetans are a Nation in exile, theirs being a colossus human tragedy. Everywhere there were posters of political prisoners and independence activists inside Tibet who had self immolated themselves protesting against the Chinese occupation and photo exhibitions which are creating awareness about the 'Free Tibet Movement.' Press conferences were organized by the independence activists as also Rock Concerts which were used to gather support for the movement. The Tibetans were very optimistic and hopeful that there would be a political solution which would end their tragedy in the near future. Their optimism flows from their redoubtable faith in Dalai Lama and their strong religious and moral orientation.





At the Kalchakra, the Tibetan youth were at the forefront doing social service making valuable contributions to its management apart from mobilizing support for the 'Free Tibet Movement.' Various Tibetan organizations spearheading the movement had put up stalls from which they distributed pamphlets, posters, and literature associated with their movement. In the course of my interaction with the Tibetan Diaspora I met several firebrand youth leaders who were espousing the Tibetan cause. Tenzin Tsundue is a famous young prolific Tibetan writer and activist who is closely associated with the Tibetan Youth Congress (very important youth organization advocating total independence) and is also the General Secretary of 'Friends on Tibet (India)'. His most famous book is *Kora*, which is a collection of poems and stories, which beautifully capture the pain and anguish of the Tibetans. Tsundue was imprisoned at Lhasa prison for 3 months by the Chinese authorities when he crossed into Tibet from India and was severely tortured. He gained global recognition in 2002 when he scaled 14 floors of a Mumbai hotel to greet Zhu Rongji (then the Chinese Premier) with a 'Free Tibet' banner

and the Tibetan National Flag. He said that the present Free Tibet movement is more assertive and proactive as compared to the earlier movement which was more passive. The movement for democracy in China as well the unrest amongst the various ethnic minorities gives hope for Tibetan solution as it might lead to a change in the Chinese polity which might adopt a positive attitude for the solution of the Tibetan Question. According to Konchok Yangphal (Executive Committee member of Tibetan Youth Congress), their movement is more radical as it stands for total independence as compared to the softer line of other groups which advocate the middle path of autonomy. Konchok is of the view that the difference of opinion regarding independence or autonomy doesn't in fact weaken the movement but in fact strengthens the democratic ethos of the movement in which there should be scope for mutual adjustment and accommodation over the differences of view points.

The 'Tibetan Women's Association' TWA, was founded in March 1959 when Tibetan women





from the three provinces stood united and challenged the brutal clampdown by the Chinese authorities. Today, TWA has 56 regional chapters all across the world. Dhardon is the Research and Media Officer of TWA. She said that the TWA stands for autonomy and was working for attracting the attention and concern of the world community towards the violation of human rights and plight of the Tibetan women inside Tibet as well as working for the empowerment of the Tibetan women living in exile all over the world as also the danger to the fragile environment of Tibet from Chinese imperialism. According to her the Tibetan women have come a long way and present a beautiful synthesis of the traditional as well as the modern which gives them strength



and optimism about a just solution to the Tibetan Cause in the near future.

Dorje Tseten is the National Director of 'Students for a Free Tibet' which advocates complete independence and has branches in 35 countries. He said that their movement is essentially political and they are actively campaigning for harnessing the support of the international community for their movement. They organize a lot of events and panel discussions for creating awareness about the Tibetan Cause and also very importantly the release of all political prisoners inside Tibet, the most notable being the young Panchen Lama who today is the second most important Tibetan religious leader. Their stall is adorned with the posters of the Panchen Lama and other political prisoners inside Tibet seeking the support of the world community for their immediate release.

'Gu-Chu- Sum' is the 'Former Political Prisoners Association' and its stall attracted huge numbers of visitors who flocked to see the photographs of the victims of Chinese atrocities. I met a number of former political prisoners who had escaped into India after being released from Chinese prisons where they were imprisoned for protesting against the Chinese occupation of their homeland. Tserang, Sundu and Lobsangyatso said that they were imprisoned at Lhasa prison for 5yrs for nonviolently protesting against Chinese occupation and were severely tortured during 1994-2000. Lobsangpalgen was imprisoned for 12 yrs at Tamu prison under unbearable conditions where he almost died of torture. They all fled to India after their release trekking through snow and treacherous terrain. The torture and the severe ordeal they had to face have not succeeded in breaking their indomitable will and resolve to struggle for the independence of their motherland. A most remarkable feature was that inspite of their adversities almost all the Tibetans, I met were highly optimistic that their country will definitely achieve independence.

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