



The Dalai Lama Institution is a Year Older!

The incumbent 14th Dalai Lama's charisma and his commitment to promote peace, happiness and compassion have earned him a place in the hearts of millions around the world. He is revered as one of the world's outstanding moral leaders. However, beyond the person of the Dalai Lama, not many people know the existence of an

age-old Dalai Lama institution, which played a pivotal role in building the nation of Tibet and leading the Tibetan Buddhist world.

The spiritual lineage of the Dalai Lama can be traced back to 1391 with the birth of Gendun Drup and the Dalai Lama institution came into being when Gendun Gyatso was installed as the reincarnation of Gendun Drup in 1485. Since then, the Dalai Lama institution has transformed into a modern institution that provides moral leadership on this global stage.

Perhaps it may not be the right time to discuss this issue when the world is struggling to come out of this devastating Covid-19 pandemic. But this matter is of utmost significance to the Tibetan people as we celebrate the 85th Birthday of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama.

Great powers of the time had extended great honor to the Dalai Lamas. The Mongol leader Altan Khan bestowed the title Dalai Lama to the 3rd Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso, and re-established the priest-patron relationship between Mongol and Tibet in the 6th century. Similarly, the second Manchu Emperor Shunzhi of the Qing Dynasty, who ruled China in the 17th century, recognized the Fifth Dalai Lama as the spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet. The British and Russian empires too interfered in the power and position of the 13th and 14th Dalai Lamas of Tibet that came to be known as the Inner Asia Great Game.

Looking back to our recent history, one might wonder about the fate of Tibetan people and its flourishing culture in exile had it not been for the institution of the Dalai Lama in general and the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The 14th Dalai Lama has played a defining role in leading the Tibetan people through the political crisis of the twentieth century.

By granting asylum to the 14th Dalai Lama in 1959, India has protected a historic institution of Tibetan nation that has evolved through centuries with successive Dalai Lamas.

One of the reasons for the introduction of democracy for the Tibetans in exile early on was to avoid an imminent leadership vacuum in the absence of the Dalai Lama and to ensure the continuity of the Tibetan freedom struggle. However, there is a prevailing concern that, notwithstanding our preparedness, we may not be able to hold onto ourselves at this critical period of our history, without the support of the person holding the throne of the institution of the Dalai Lama.

The historical role of the Dalai Lama has changed with the devolution of all his political authorities to elected Tibetan leadership. But the significance and relevance of the Dalai Lama and his institution have become more critical to the survival of the Tibetan freedom movement and our national identity. China, a religion-denier, meddling in the process of finding the next Dalai Lama may result in installing a fake person, devoid of all cultural relevance, without the popular support of Tibetans.

There are historical records of successive Manchu emperors undermining the roles and authorities of the Dalai Lamas. Constant interferences in Tibetan polity were believed to be the cause of the early demise of four Dalai Lamas, i.e., from 9th to the 12th Dalai Lama. Two of them died when they were 9 and 10. Surprisingly, the institution of the Dalai Lama survived during those turbulent times.

It is a different time today. Tibetans are fighting an unequal battle with China with the world kowtowing to China with their overriding commercial interests defining their roles. The geopolitics of the world is apparently shifting, at least temporarily, due to the coronavirus pandemic. Many countries are seeking to rewrite their long-held appeasement policy concerning China. Trade war, financial decoupling and economic sanctions are on the rise to get even with the Chinese government in hope of making it act more responsibly.

The relevance and significance of the Dalai Lama institution go beyond a nation and a people. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama stands not only as a beacon of hope to the Tibetan people, but an inspiring leadership in the advancement of peace and

compassion to humanity at large. Nevertheless, the survival of the Tibetan nation and our distinct culture rests mostly upon the Dalai Lama institution.

Given the might of our adversary, Tibetans alone cannot fight the battle against Chinese leadership who has been operating a campaign to weaken the role and position of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhism. It is the time for Tibetan people as well as for peace loving people in the world to appreciate the past contributions of the Dalai Lama institution and explicitly support and recognize the future potential of the institution in contributing peace in the world, and saving a nation and people.



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