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MY LAND AND MY PEOPLE: AN APPEAL FOR PEACE AND HUMANITY

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Abstract

My Land and My People is the finest example of a memoir. It is written by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. The whole story of this book moves around Tibet and its people. This book was first published in the year 1964, which was written just after his leaving of Motherland Tibet. It describes his life in Tibet and his migration to India only. This book is very significant for many reasons, as its vast description of Tibet and earnest appeal for free Tibet etc. While writing this book he himself has mentioned the purpose behind the book. It is more than an autobiography because it delivers a message of humanity and nonviolence.

Keywords: Tibet, Nonviolence, Humanity Cruelty, Desire, Motherland.

My Land and My People is the first autobiography of His Holiness, Tenzing Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama. He is the Head of State and Spiritual Leader of the People of Tibet. He was awarded the Noble Peace Prize in 1989. His full name is "Justsun Jamplel Ngawang Labsang Yeshe Tenzing Gyatso (Holy Lord Gentle Glory Compassionate Defender of the Faith Ocean of Wisdom)." There is a myth regarding the Dalai Lama. The people of Tibet believe in "Bodhisattva" (Bodhisattva is a Sanskrit word, which means a person who has achieved enlightenment or Buddhahood). People of Tibet believe that Lord Buddha will appear on this earth for peace and harmony and that Lord Buddha will guide and protect the people of Tibet from all types of evils. They have deep faith in it. Besides this, they are deeply compassionate.

About the Book *My Land and My People* is the 14th Dalai Lama's first book published in year 1964. It was written just after his leaving of motherland Tibet. It is his first autobiography when he was driven into exile by communist China. It is one of the most touching and heartbreaking document ever published. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet related the story of his brief tumultuous reign climaxed by the appalling destruction and systematic murder of his people by the Chinese. It gives a vast description of Tibetan culture, tradition, clothing, food, physical features, religious beliefs, history, festivals, Monasteries etc. The book also gives a vivid description of him and his family in nutshell. He writes in a simple language and uses short sentences. He gives a clear-cut view of his life and ideas. This book contains his appeal for peace and humanity to the mankind worldwide. In this book there is a letter, which he has written to United Nations on September 29, 1960. It is one of the most famous memoirs ever written by any author in the world. The book also holds an importance because of its diasporic note. It is a very interesting book, which focuses on the people of the Tibet, especially those around Dalai Lama, their struggle, hopes, fear and challenges. It is a sincere sample of the Tibetan life into which he was born and among whom he as reincarnation of his predecessor was discovered and declared the Dalai Lama according to his country's ancient customs beliefs. *My Land and My People* is a tragic book yet it is deeply inspiring for the whole story it tells with the gentle forgiving spirit of a great Buddhist monk. This is a very interesting book consisting of thirteen Chapters.

Memoirs. The word memoir is a French word meaning "Memory" or "Reminiscence". We may also say that it is a collection of memories that an individual writes about the events or moments that he himself has experienced or even those about which he has only learned or read both public and private. It is a subcategory of biography or autobiography. This new genre has appeared in the late 20th century and has now become very popular. A biography or autobiography generally tells the story "of a life" while memoir often tells the story "from a life." Such a touchstone of special event which may be a turning point in anybody's life. A memoir may also be called a narrative story composed from personal experience or account. It

may be record of events written by a person having intimate knowledge based on personal observations.

Almost all the works of the 14th Dalai Lama are full of autobiographical elements. In these works, he has mentioned his days in his motherland and his life before his coming to India. He keeps on a fire alive in his heart and mind about his motherland and its importance in anybody's life. Both Mother and Motherland are vital parts of our lives. Their value increases manifold especially when one is compelled to live away from it or deprived of it. In the same manner when the 14th Dalai Lama was compelled to live away from his motherland Tibet, the result was that all his works are full of diasporic elements. His memoirs of Tibet have covered the whole horizon of his work. So while writing any piece of work the 14th Dalai Lama becomes quite nostalgic and seems lost in his past memories. These memoirs are almost unavoidable part of the works of the 14th Dalai Lama. Most of his books contain the line 'When I lived in Tibet...'

My Land and My People is not a simple autobiography but it is an appeal for humanity to humankind or the world. It leaves an impression in the hearts and minds of the readers. Through this book, 14th Dalai Lama has presented the inhuman practices indulged by human beings towards their brethren. He has also successfully portrayed the atrocities of the powerful over the weak. This book contains thirteen chapters. Let us quickly take a glance at them.

The initial chapters of this book contain a brief description of the author's birth, life, family, ancestors and his education at Potala Palace and especially about his motherland Tibet.

Later chapters of this book deal with the trauma that the 14th Dalai Lama and his people faced in their life. Description of the crisis of Tibet begins in the third chapter '*Peace in Mind.*' However, the major part of this chapter contains a vast description about the history, culture, literature, dress and the relations of Tibet with outer world. He also writes about the administration and different rank of officers, police, jurists, monks etc. At the end of this chapter, he writes:

"So we were happy; Desire brings discontent, happiness springs from a peaceful mind. For many Tibetans, material life was hard, but they were not the victims of desire; and in simplicity and poverty among our mountains, perhaps there was more peace of mind than there is in most of the cities of the world." (D: 68)

Actually, he wishes to deliver a message that everyone can acquire peace if he or she can overcome his or her desire. Actually while writing these lines the author wants to convey the great message of Buddhist philosophy. As his Holiness 14th Dalai Lama is basically a religious leader and the reincarnation of his predecessor so his messages are always related with religious preachings. He tries to point out that desires may lead one to mental trauma. The above sentences reflect his reference to the eight-fold path of Buddhism. The most important principle of Buddhism is giving up of the path of desire and attain perfection as a result of which everyone can achieve the greatest joy of life which is inside the heart of everyone and the only thing is that we have to realize it that the joy and happiness is not in the worldly things but it is in the peace and humanity and when we help others we can attain that gladness from inside. This perfection of happiness and joy is attained by most of the Tibetan people. As a result, they are poor in worldly things but rich in spiritual things, which provide an inner relief and give rise to a fountain of gladness, which has its source in the heart of each Tibetan, which is also deep rooted in the Tibetan soil and culture.

It is a book that covers the whole horizon of Tibet. As a result, in the fourth chapter *Our Neighbour China*, the author describes, China-Tibet relationship from a historical perspective in a chronological order. He also writes about Chinese attacks, British expedition to Lhasa and Shimla declaration.

The titles of the chapters of this book are closely related with the themes of the chapter. The title of the fifth chapter is *Invasion* and it hits its theme in particular. In the year 1948 when the 14th Dalai Lama was only a student, he received the news, that the Chinese army had attacked Tibet. He made an appeal to all the adjacent countries for help but it failed to get any unturned and the Chinese army reached Lhasa. The author in these words creates a very pathetic picture.

"Other kinds of food were also demanded and the humble resources of the city began to be strained, and prices began to rise." (D: 91)

It was because Tibetan refugees from the east were taking shelter in the city of Lhasa. What a great tragedy that the people are refugees in their own country and had to starved. This chapter ends with an appeal of non-violence. The description of the pathetic scene created by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama brings tears in the eyes of the readers. A citizen, but refugee in his own country! All of them were making an appeal for mercy for the sake of their life. Tibet was once the world's most peaceful nation. Tibet was the only nation who had not participated in any war, even the two world wars. It was a nation that completely believes in non-violence. It was free from all sorts of violence. It followed the preaching of Lord Buddha. Peace and humanity is spread all around in the soil of Tibet where innocent people harvest the crop of faith, respect and peace. They burn all desire and achieved the perfection of life. Tibet was the only nation with the least army and as a result it was crushed and transformed into a land of dead people. They were brutally assaulted, killed and murdered. Chinese army has not left even small babies and kids of the mother's lap. They were snatched and killed or burned alive in front of everyone.

"And violent opposition was not only unpractical, it was also unethical." (D: 98)

Actually, this book is written in a tabloid manner, so the incidents are discussed in chronological order. The 14th Dalai Lama is not only religious leader, but also a prophet of peace. That is why he went to China to made an attempt to save the life of his people even at the risk of his own life. During the journey author came to know about the cruel practice of the Chinese troop. He has also expressed his discounted over the injustice done by the Chinese by imposing more taxes on villages invaded by them.

Further author became quite diosporic when he writes:

"My journey through the border areas reminded me of two of my observation in China it self one very sad and the other revealing on remaining ray of hope" (D: 130)

As a spiritual as well as political leader of Tibet, he went to China with a message and a hope of peace. His heart was filled with the sorrow when he has seen the destruction caused by the Chinese people around the border area, but at the same time, he was hopeful that he would be able to save his people. Even today, he is hopeful that one day Tibet will be free from the Chinese oppression and they shall return to their motherland.

These words have a unique mixture of joy and sorrow, but with a ray of hope.

Further, the 14th Dalai Lama describes crisis in these words:

"Some of them lost their lives in the revolt against the Chinese rule in Lhasa and a few still under the age of twenty become refugees in India" (D: 131)

These lines bring tears in the eyes of readers. Again and again author made several attempts to save his motherland and his people from the cruelty of China. However, almost all his attempts were unturned. He visited India on pilgrimage on the occasion of Buddha Purnima. This journey was not a simple journey but a journey with a special purpose. At this place, he is filled with the remorse because according to the Tibetan belief, he is god and protects the people of Tibet from all types of evils but he is helpless. He clearly writes his purpose behind the journey.

"But from India I could atleast tell people all over the world what was happening in Tibet and try to mobilize, their moral support for us, and so perhaps beings a change in China's ruthless policy" (D:147)

My Land and My people make red and watery eyes of the readers when they read. There is a question mark in the above lines regarding the human value, whether we are born for love or hatred, creation or destruction. We human beings are enemy of our own race. It reminded me the great lines of a great poem "The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot. But what a great (grim) tragedy that we are destroying our own race and also destroying peace of the world just for our own worldly pleasure. The pleasure, which is short, lived.

"Thus village and monasteries were being totally destroyed Lamas and the lay leaders of the people were being humiliated, imprisoned, killed and even tortured. Land was confiscated, sacred images, books of scriptures and other things of holy significance to us, broken up, derided or simply stolen" (D: 158)

As the pages of book turn crisis and tragedy described in the book deepens. Some times, author describes the events in commentary style. It seems that he is not a simple author but presenting a picture gallery in front of the readers. When Chinese army reached Lhasa and decided to destroy the Potala Palace and kidnap the 14th Dalai Lama. Author takes a hard decision to leave his motherland. Innocent people were attacked and slaughtered. Author turns very Diasporas while describing it. The 14th Dalai Lama has got a strong diasporic undercurrent where is agony wails at having to leave his motherland touches the heart of readers. As the author escaped from the Potala Palace, merciless slaughter of the innocent Tibetan people at Lhasa increased. This leaves a question mark in mind of the readers that, what type of human being we are?

Last chapter of this book *Present and Future* shows the culmination or apex of the cruelty. The 14th Dalai Lama strongly protests against this cruelty.

"They have not only been shot, but beaten to death crucified, burnt alive, drowned, vivisected, starved, strangled, hanged scalded, buried alive, disemboweled and beheaded. These killings have been done in public" (D: 222)

The cruelty of Chinese troop is quite difficult to describe in the words. They have treated innocent Tibetan people worst than the animals. Their behaviour was not only cruel but also beyond anyone's imagination. Respected Lamas were treated in in this manner:

"..... by harnessing them to ploughs, riding them like horsed, whipping and treating, them and other methods too evil to mention." (D: 222)

The cruelty of Chinese people was not stopped at this point. Innocent babies stilled at the breast were also tortured. Besides these crimes against the people, the Chinese have destroyed hundreds of monasteries, temples etc. or used them as barracks, stables or as army camps.

Even the International Commission considered the Chinese guilty of the gravest crime of which any person or nation can be accessed. That was genocide, with an intention to destroy in whole or impart a national ethnical, racial or religious group as such. The gravity of the cruelty was at apex and which is unbelievable.

Even after this cruel destruction, the 14th Dalai Lama along with his people has a hope that one day they return to "My Land."

Conclusion

This book explains the grim tragedy, which followed in Tibet in details, along with the reports and an appeal to International Commission of Jurists. In this book, the author has tried to give a more personal account of his life along with the people of Tibet. This book is full of sad and tragic events, which ended the happy life of the innocent Tibetan people. He has also mentioned some principle of Buddhism. This book is in form of storytelling and written in a simple manner so that everyone will understand. At many places, he added his individual emotions along with his people. We can call this book a "Book of Tibet." It presents a picture gallery of Tibetan people, art, culture, history, religion. We can call it the fragrance of Tibet. This book ends with a ray of hope that one day they shall breathe in fresh air of free Tibet. With the help of this book, the 14th Dalai Lama delivers a message of humanity to mankind in general. He makes an earnest appeal of non-violence. This book is not the voice of a single man but it is the voice of all those people who are victim of cruelty of powerful people over the weak and innocent. With the help of this book, author makes an appeal for peace and humanity for the people in general with the special reference of the innocent people of Tibet who face the brutality of Chinese people. He is at the same time feeling helpless for his people. They want to live a life of self-respect and honour but their prestige was ruined and no remedy was granted. With the help of this book, he is trying to visualize the condition of the refugees around the world.

Reference: 14th Dalai Lama: *My Land and My People*, Srishti Publishers & Distributors, 1997.