

Buddhism: book report on the freedom in exile



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Book Report on " Freedom in Exile: An Autobiography of the Dalai Lama by His Holiness the Dalai Lama XIV" The book d Freedom in Exile is the autobiographical account of the life of the fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibets erstwhile theocracy. Born as Tenzin Gyatso, the life of this popular religious leader is intertwined with the political developments in his country of birth. Buddhists believe in the concept of reincarnation, whereby the soul of a deceased person re-emerges in the birth of another. It was through this process that the boy named Tenzin Gyatso was identified to embody the soul a deceased Lama. Consequently he was anointed to take the title of Dalai Lama and the rights and responsibilities that come with it. This was a time when major political changes were taking place in neighboring China, with the Communist Party gaining ascendancy to power. Not long after, the Communist Party of China (CPC) decided to occupy Tibet and being the region under the purview of Communist rule. As the young Dalai Lama recounts in his autobiography, the stated reasons for occupation had quite the opposite effect on the native Tibetans. In other words, while the CPC proclaimed it as the liberation of the oppressive feudal system then prevailing in Tibet, the process of liberation had created additional suffering and distress for the already ravished people.

The Dalai Lamas account of this most tumultuous period in Tibets history is not unbiased. For seen in balance, the standard of living of native Tibetan peasants has improved a lot under the CPC rule. The CPC had made policies and fund allocations to improve the essential infrastructure and basic amenities for the Tibetan people. For instance, the trans-Tibetan railway, which is said to be the highest railway line above sea-level is acclaimed as a feat of engineering. This railway line connects the Tibetan plateau to

mainland China, thereby creating economic opportunities for Tibetans. There have also been reports coming in about the greater literacy levels, better access to healthcare, etc for the present generation of Tibetans. Such developments would not have happened if the Tibetan society had remained under the control of the feudal lords and religious leaders. Hence, one gets the feeling that the Dalai Lama does not talk much about the positive aspects of the Chinese rule, but only its negative aspects.

The book is full of interesting anecdotes and insights that keeps the reader engaged to the narrative. The other interesting phase in the life of the Dalai Lama was the early years of his exile to India. The Dalai Lama is gracious in his acknowledgement of the Indian governments (then under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru) provisions for the Tibetan refugees. Under the guidance of Nehru, the Dalai Lama and his fellow refugees had set up a home away from home in the hill station town of Dharamsala in Northern India. The difficulties incurred in assimilating to the Indian climatic and cultural conditions were especially poignantly written. Since then the Dalai Lama has been a popular ambassador for world peace and is constantly travelling across the world and spreading this message of peace. While he is today a global citizen, the essence of his teachings are Buddhist in their origins. The Dalai Lama ends the autobiography on a hopeful note, praying to God that the Tibetans living in exile (in India and elsewhere) are eventually returned to their homeland. But, given the present stronghold of China over Tibet, this outcome remains unlikely in the immediate future.