

Partners, not rivals

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Tianjin signals more than a thaw in ties; it represents a calculated embrace driven by shifting global dynamics. With New Delhi’s relations with Washington at their most strained in over twenty years—thanks largely to Donald Trump’s tariff wars and caustic rhetoric—India’s willingness to reaffirm cooperation with China is a pragmatic pivot. Because let us all accept it: India and China are natural partners, and not rivals. At Tianjin, the optics were deliberate. Modi’s reminder that India and China both pursue “strategic autonomy” and must not view their relationship through the lens of any “third country” was a clear message to Washington: New Delhi will not be confined to a single geopolitical camp. For Xi, grappling with turbulence in the global order, the meeting was an opportunity to rally the Global South around multipolarity and fairness in trade. Yet this meeting is not just about global signaling. At its heart lies a recognition that peace and stability at the border are prerequisites for any meaningful progress in bilateral ties. The eastern Ladakh standoff and the deadly clashes in Galwan in 2020 left deep scars. By emphasising tranquility along the Line of Actual Control, both leaders acknowledged that economic cooperation cannot flourish without a basic security guarantee. The disengagement achieved last year must be preserved and expanded. On the economic front, the agenda is clear: India and China have the potential to drive global trade stability at a time of protectionism and fragmentation. The trade imbalance remains a sore point, but Xi’s willingness to engage on fairer terms, combined with India’s push to expand investment ties, could mark the beginning of a more balanced relationship. For two economies housing 2.8 billion people, collaboration is not an option but an imperative. At the same time, New Delhi must tread carefully. The border dispute remains unresolved, and mistrust lingers. China’s references to defending “international fairness” and “multipolarity” resonate, but India cannot afford to be blindsided by rhetoric. Pragmatism, not romanticism, should define the reset. The decision to expand people-to-people exchanges, resume the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, and ease visas is welcome. Cultural and human ties often outlast political cycles and provide resilience in times of strain. They must be nurtured. This is not the first attempt at rapprochement after a crisis, nor will it be the last. What will distinguish this reset is whether both sides can move beyond tactical convenience towards structural trust. Modi and Xi’s embrace is encouraging, but the real test will come in the months ahead: can they maintain peace on the border while building fairer trade rules? If yes, then the Tianjin meeting could be remembered not merely as a diplomatic handshake, but as the start of a new chapter in Asia’s story.

Dalai Lama’s Reincarnation, Ladakh, & the Battle for Civilizational Sovereignty

■ MRIDULL THAPLU

Enemy is Always an Enemy — With Moderation or Sophistication!

After the United States’ tariff war, India and China appeared to move closer diplomatically. Yet history reminds us that trust with China is fragile; memories of Beijing’s conduct during Operation Sindoor continue to haunt strategic thinking. In foreign policy, there are no permanent friends or foes, but when it comes to China, history looms large. The prudent course for India is to pursue a middle path. The Tibet question, therefore, cannot be brushed aside.

The matter of the reincarnation of the 14th Dalai Lama has today emerged not merely as a theological or religious issue within Tibetan Buddhism, but as one of the most profound geopolitical questions of the 21st century. This is particularly true for India, and even more so for Ladakh, which has historically served as both a cultural bridge and a strategic frontier between Tibet, India, and Central Asia.

For Indians who place national sovereignty, civilizational heritage, and cultural identity at the forefront, the Dalai Lama’s reincarnation cannot be viewed in isolation.

It is inseparable from India’s civilizational role in Asia and its defence against expansionist forces that seek to undermine Dharma.

The institution of the Dalai Lama itself is rooted in centuries-old Tibetan Buddhist traditions that flourished in close contact with India.

The foundations of Tibetan Buddhism were laid through the transmission of Nalanda Buddhism by Indian masters such as Acharya Shantarakshita, Acharya Atisha, and Guru Padma-sambhava, whose teachings were carried into Tibet, sanctified, and localized. India, as the motherland of Buddhism, thus has an inalienable civilizational stake in the future of Tibetan Buddhism and its leadership.

The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, who has lived in exile in India since 1959, has embodied this connection by making Dharamshala both the seat of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and a testimony to India’s role as protector of Buddhist Dharma in the modern age.

The 14th Dalai Lama himself has hinted that his reincarnation could be discovered outside Tibet, possibly in India. Ladakh stands as one of the most legitimate candidates, carrying within its soil the uninterrupted flame of Buddhist practice, free from communist interference. If the next Dalai Lama were discovered in Ladakh, it would safeguard the authenticity of Tibetan Buddhism, reinforce India’s civilizational role as the protector of Dharma, and reject China’s illegitimate claims. It would also strengthen the cultural and spiritual bond between Ladakh and the Indian nation-state. This question must also be seen through the lens of national security. Ladakh is not merely a cultural outpost but also a geopolitical battleground, as seen in the Galwan clash of 2020 where Indian soldiers defended the nation against Chinese aggression.

The crux of the issue, however, lies in what happens after his passing.

The Communist regime in China, which has consistently suppressed religion, destroyed monasteries, and rewritten Tibetan history, now arrogates to itself the authority to declare that it alone will recognize the Dalai Lama’s reincarnation.

This claim is not only a distortion of religion but also a calculated attempt to Sinicize Tibetan Buddhism and sever it from its Indian civilizational roots. The Chinese Communist Party, officially atheist, has no moral or spiritual legitimacy to interfere in such matters, yet it is preparing to anoint a puppet Dalai Lama to serve Beijing’s interests.

From Ladakh’s perspective, the stakes are even higher. With its centuries-old Buddhist traditions, renowned monasteries such as Hemis, Thiksey, Alchi, and Lamayuru, and a population steadfast in its devotion, Ladakh is not a passive spectator.

The 14th Dalai Lama himself has hinted that his reincarnation could be discovered outside Tibet, possibly in India. Ladakh stands as one of the most legitimate candidates, carrying within its soil the uninterrupted flame of Buddhist practice, free from communist interference.

If the next Dalai Lama were discovered in Ladakh, it would safeguard the authenticity of Tibetan Buddhism, reinforce India’s civilizational role as the protector of Dharma, and reject China’s illegitimate claims. It would also strengthen the cultural and spiritual bond between Ladakh and the Indian

nation-state.

This question must also be seen through the lens of national security. Ladakh is not merely a cultural outpost but also a geopolitical battleground, as seen in the Galwan clash of 2020 where Indian soldiers defended the nation against Chinese aggression. The PLA’s repeated intrusions and militarization of Tibet are part of a grand design to impose Chinese dominance across the Himalayas. By seeking control of the Dalai Lama institution, Beijing is weaponizing religion to further this expansionist project.

For India, therefore, supporting the authentic reincarnation process rooted in Tibetan tradition and free of Chinese interference is both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity. It would cement India’s cultural ties with Tibetans, elevate Ladakh’s role as a spiritual centre, and deny China the ability to manipulate Buddhism for political ends.

This issue also reflects the broader civilizational struggle. India, as heir to Sanatana Dharma, has historically been the fountainhead of Hindu and Buddhist traditions. China, under communist ideology, has sought to destroy ancient cultures and religions. Its claim over Tibet and its interference in Tibetan Buddhism amount to cultural genocide and a direct assault on Dharma.

For Indians who believe in Bharat’s civilizational resurgence, protecting Tibetan Buddhism and ensuring the rightful succession of the Dalai Lama is part of defending Sanatana values against hostile forces. In this context, Ladakh emerges as both a geographical and

spiritual frontier in the battle for Dharma.

India must, therefore, prepare to play an active role in the succession process, supporting the Dalai Lama’s guidance that his reincarnation will not take place under Chinese occupation. Establishing institutional frameworks within India, particularly in Ladakh, to recognize and support the authentic successor would galvanize the Buddhist world, rally international opinion against Chinese religious interference, and affirm India’s resolve to defend both its borders and its civilizational responsibilities.

Such a step would empower Ladakh as the guardian of Tibetan Buddhist heritage while strengthening its integration into the Indian nation-state, a process accelerated after the abrogation of Article 370 and Ladakh’s status as a Union Territory.

The reincarnation of the Dalai Lama is thus not merely a spiritual question but a test of India’s civilizational will. By asserting its role as the natural custodian of Tibetan Buddhism and rejecting China’s illegitimate claims, India can ensure that the authentic reincarnation—possibly in Ladakh—symbolizes not only Tibetan hope but also India’s rebirth as Vishwaguru, the guiding light of Asia.

Aniket Mahapatra is an Indologist, Author & Professor and can be reached at mahapatraaniket2012@gmail.com, while Vivek Sharma, a Budhjologist, Author & Professor can be contacted at dr.viveksharma@rocketmail.com

Quota Circus: Hooting For Mediocrity

■ POONAM I KAUSHISH

Circa 1989: Prime Minister VP Singh unleashed the Mandal genie of reservation on an unsuspecting nation. Resulting, in a 18-year old student Rajeev Goswami immolating himself at one end and Made in India leaders RJD’s Lalu, Samajwadi’s Mulayam and BSP Mayawati milking Singh’s policy to sit on the Raj Gaddi.

Since then every politician worth his salt continues to run riot on quotas and queues like moongphalis with populist bravado and mindlessness as a sure-shot panacea to power. Whereby people are compartmentalized for sacrifice at the altar of caste-creed politics in the name of social and economic upliftment. Big deal, if it threatens to destroy the nation’s body politic.

Circa 2025: The vexed Maratha reservation has flared up again in the run-up to mega local bodies election in Maharashtra and has BJP’s Government in knots. By an unknown Maratha multiple-job worker Manoj Jarange who is on fast in Mumbai till the State Government concedes his 10% quota for Marathas. He wants them recognised as Kunbis, an agrarian caste included in OBC category, which will make them eligible for reservation in Government jobs and education.

Pertinently, demand for Maratha quota began 1982, flickered after a Maratha girl’s rape-murder in Ahmednagar July 2016 which fuelled demand for reservation. In 2017, a faceless-leaderless morcha was held in Mumbai. In 2021 Supreme Court denied Marathas reservations as it found inadequate reason for Maharashtra to exceed 50% quotas cap.

In 2023 Jarange became the face of Maratha reservation leading to then-Chief Minister Shinde promising to give reservation within the Constitutional and legal framework. Today, Chief

Minister Fadnavis is grappling on how to uphold this assurance, deputing a delegation led by Justice Shinde to hold talks with him.

Why blame Jarange? Bihar Chief Minister Nitish too called for lifting 50% reservation ceiling. Rajasthan’s former Chief Minister Gehlot announced 6% reservation to MBCs in addition to 21% for OBCs. Ditto in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Telengana. Also, OBC sub-categorisation has been implemented at Panchayat level by West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Andhra, Telangana, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Bihar, J&K, Haryana and Puducherry.

One can understand State Governments push for reservation laws as there is widespread unemployment-related distress in the country. As leaders are elected by citizens it seems reasonable for rulers to attempt to secure interests of their voters.

Yet, these quotas are not only problematic, don’t make economic sense but also do not measure up to the Constitutional letter and spirit. Summed by Supreme Court: “The concept of Constitutional morality has been openly violated by introducing a separate distinction curtailing the right of livelihood. It cannot be at the cost of nurturing mediocrity.”

All fail to realize politicisation of caste is a double-edged sword. Caste needs politics as much as politics need caste. When caste groupings make politics their sphere of activities they get a chance to assert their identity and strive for power and position.

Arguably, bestowing reservations may not always be a solution for politicians. Think, Marathas, account for 35% population of the State, are socially forward, not backward. Alongside, this has upset OBCs who fear Marathas ‘backdoor entry’ will eat into their 27% quota in jobs and education once reservations for them is granted.

Questionably is reservation an end in itself? Has any objective study been done to find out the end result? Whether those provided reserva-

tion have gained or continued to lose? How does it better the lot of the ‘deprived’ if a few persons get educated or jobs? Will not caste further fractionalize national politics? When does justice supercede competence? Whatever happened to merit and excellence?

True, the Government’s fundamental mission is to uplift poor and backward classes, educate and provide them equal opportunities. But whether this would translate into equal outcome is debatable. The problem arises when our netagan in their quest for votes and greed for power recklessly calculate reservation on the basis of their vote-banks they feel there is a greater chance it will have greater electoral pull. Specially when they can reap a political windfall of over 70% votes via reservation. Never mind if it pushes India back by a century.

Alas, so blinded are politicians for satta that none sees consequences of the caste genie they recklessly continue to let loose. Unfortunately, ground realities and make-believes sociology do not always correspond. Reservations by themselves cannot be the sole panacea for eradicating poverty, nor is it a guarantee that members of certain castes will get Government jobs or seats in educational institutions.

Our netas and their progenies should remember that social justice and equal opportunity is not the prerogative of a chosen few. By that token, the whole social reform movement will become meaningless. Also, universalisation of reservation will mean goodbye to excellence and standards --- a ‘must’ for any modern nation that wishes to forge ahead.

As it stands the system of caste based quotas has become divisive and self-defeating. What India needs is to provide quality education to all as reservations are no answer to fulfilling the people’s aspirations. By cramming down quotas in education and jobs is like putting the cart before the horse.

The truth is that we are today caught in a vicious circle which has been made a lot more ma-

lignant by our unstable and fragmented politics. Not just that. The sceptor that haunts us is not of class struggle but of caste struggle. Backwards vs forwards, majority vs minority have become more meaningful than Left and Right in politics.

The tragedy is that our political class wants the present show to go on. Certainly, social justice is a desirable and laudable goal. But it cannot be at the cost of nurturing inequity. Remember, there is no place for double standards or Orwellian concept of ‘more equal than others’ in a democracy. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

Importantly, Article 15(1) provide for equal opportunities for all irrespective of caste, creed or sex. Reservation per se not only goes against this and divides people but also harms national unity, integrity and fraternity. Let’s not fudge or forget this.

In the ultimate, the Government has to end the evil of separatism a la Mandal II. Reservations are no answer for fulfilling the peoples’ aspirations.

It will not only further divide our people on caste-creed lines but is also short-sighted and antithetical to any hope of narrowing India’s burgeoning divide between haves and have-nots. The Government has no right to limit opportunities for the deserving or to shrink the public space for autonomy and free association.

If this situation is not corrected now, India will soon become a State of incompetence and mediocrity. It is imperative our leaders create a level-playing field. Time Centre-State Governments rethink and rework entire reservation policy and stop blind application of quotas. No longer will young India accept that power in privilege can be transformed through electoral competition into power in numbers.

As Ambedkar said, “Reservation should be done away with because it becomes a hindrance to development.” If Bharat has to reach its pinnacle of success it cannot revel in petty politics. What gives? ---- INFA

THE EARTH NEWS

Owner, Printer, Publisher
and Editor in Chief:
Shivang Satya Gupta

Sahil Rasgotra
Executive Editor
9596740777| mailsahilr@gmail.com

Devender Padha
Ladkah Resident Editor 94196-50048

Yash Khajuria
Senior Correspondent. 98584-08896

Abishkar Upadhaya
Ladakh Bureau Chief. 88991-61232

Neeraj Singh
Advt. Manager. 99062-19474

Akhil Mahajan
Udhampur Bureau Chief

Nikhil
Columnist

Published at:
Anjuman-Imamia Building,
Main Market, Leh-Ladakh

Printed at:
JK Printing and Publications,
Near Matador Stand, Sunjwan, Jammu.

Phone No: 0191-2950849
e-mails: earthnewsladakh@gmail.com,
editor.earthnews@gmail.com,
shivangsatyapal@gmail.com

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed by authors are their own and the publication cannot be held responsible for them. All disputes are subject to exclusive jurisdiction of competent courts and forums in Jammu city.

Editor