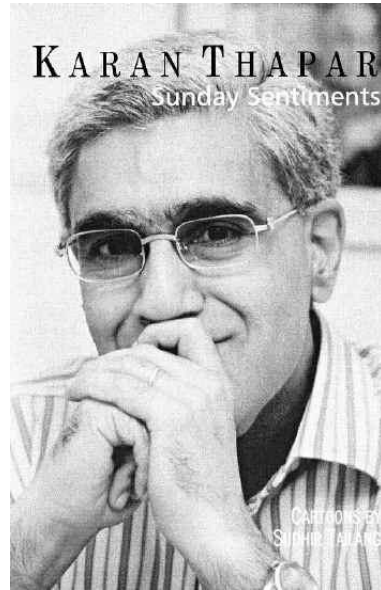


Devil's Advocate: Dalai Lama



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Karan Thapar: After almost 50 years of Tibetan uprising, where does the Tibet issue stand today? That's the key issue Karan Thapar asked His Holiness Dalai Lama in an exclusive interview on Devil's Advocate.

Your Holiness, it's almost been 30 years since you adopted the middle way, giving up Tibet's claims of independence and instead accepting meaningful autonomy within China. The problem is that Chinese have shown no flexibility, no willingness to accommodate you and on the other hand, the Tibetan Youth Congress is calling for a more strident, assertive policy. Are you falling between two stools?

Dalai Lama: Firstly, we are fully committed about democracy. So, among our community, there are different views, even very serious criticisms of certain policies. However, our position is not seeking independence, but trying to achieve genuine autonomy that Chinese Constitution also provided. I think that though concrete research has not yet come, the Chinese intellectuals and educationists are showing genuine support and appreciation for our approach.

Karan Thapar: *Let's explore that Your Holiness. The Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, on March 16, laid down conditions that he says you have to accept before the Chinese prepare to talk to you. He says first of all you must abandon all support for Tibetan independence and must accept that Tibet has always been, since antiquity, an inseparable part of China. Are you prepared to accept that?*

Dalai Lama: Now, I think the whole world knows that I am not seeking independence. As far as history is concerned, I always make clear – past is past. It's not a political decision. It's up to the historian or the legal expert...

Karan Thapar: *Can I interrupt, Your Holiness? The Chinese say that in fact you may claim that you have accepted Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, but many of your statements suggest otherwise.*

"Our position is not seeking independence, but trying to achieve genuine autonomy that Chinese Constitution also provided."

For instance, in statement on Tibetan Uprising Day on March 10, 1995, you said, 'The reality of today is that Tibet is an occupied country under colonial rule.' In you famous five points you said 'Tibet was a completely independent state in 1949 when the PLA entered'. Now the Chinese say these statements prove that you don't accept that Tibet has always been a part of China. They, in fact, prove you still want independence.

Dalai Lama: I think, even among Chinese the opinion about history differs. Some time ago, the Chinese government said Tibet was a part of China since seventh century because of marriage. Then eventually, they dropped it and insisted it was since 13th century. Now even on that there are differing views among the Chinese scholars. Anyway, past is past. When PLA came to Tibet, at that time according to legal experts, Tibet was a de facto independent nation. So, according to that view, we consider Tibet an occupied land. But that does not mean that we are seeking independence because the world is changing. The reality is changing. Tibet is a backward country, economically and materially. Spiritually we are very advanced that everyone knows. Therefore, for our own independence and for material growth, we want to remain within People's Republic of China

Karan Thapar: *So, therefore, you are saying that you have accepted Chinese sovereignty over Tibet?*

Dalai Lama: Yes.

Karan Thapar: *You no longer want independence?*

Dalai Lama: Yes.

Karan Thapar: *The Chinese say one other thing, Your Holiness. They say you keep calling for demilitarisation of Tibet, you keep calling for removal of all settlers from Tibet. They say again, this is an attempt to achieve independence by the subterfuge, by the backdoor.*

"When they reach Lhasa, people realise that Tibet is actually ruled by terror."

Dalai Lama: No. I think they did not carefully read my statement in the eighties. The meaning eventually was—and it was an agreement that India or neighboring states agreed to—that Tibet should hopefully be a zone of peace and must be demilitarised. I just said it as a dream, it's my dream.

Karan Thapar: *It's not a condition?*

Dalai Lama: No, not now.

Karan Thapar: *It's a dream for the future, not a condition?*

Dalai Lama: Yes, it's a dream.

Karan Thapar: *One other thing: you have called for what you say a "high-level autonomy" for "real autonomy" in Tibet. The Chinese say Tibet already enjoys autonomy under China. What is it that you want and Chinese haven't given? Where does Chinese autonomy fall short?*

"The Tibet issue is not my issue—as in, not an individual's issue or "old institution."

Dalai Lama: I think many visit Tibet including many Chinese. When they reach Lhasa, they realise that Tibet is actually ruled by terror. The autonomy is not that. The Tibetan should have their final authority except foreign affairs and defence. The rest of the business Tibetans can handle, may be even better, because they know Tibetan mentality and geographical situations.

That's what I am seeking. On paper, yes, there is autonomy. But in reality, every key position is occupied by the Chinese who have no idea of Tibetan culture or Tibetan habits or mentality. Of course, there's no question (of understanding) the value of Tibetan spirituality.

Karan Thapar: *And here this is a condition. This is not a dream for future. This has to happen now.*

Dalai Lama: That's right.

Karan Thapar: *This is very important.*

Dalai Lama: That's right.

Karan Thapar: *And when the Chinese say they have given autonomy to Tibet, you say that's not autonomy, the Chinese have given terror.*

Dalai Lama: That's right. At the moment the rule of terror is the reality of Tibet.

"I think the Government of India's

Karan Thapar: *One other thing Your Holiness. The Chinese say you keep calling all Tibetan-speaking people outside the boundaries of Tibet to be incorporated in a large Tibet. They say that is impractical, it's never happened in history, it can't happen today.*

policies towards Tibet are difficult to change."

Dalai Lama: As I mentioned earlier, we are not looking at history. Today's reality is that the danger of diminution of our culture is being felt in all parts of Tibet. So all the six million Tibetans are very much eager to preserve their own culture, language and spirituality. Therefore, we here in free countries—morally speaking and also in reality—are acting on behalf of these people.

So therefore, since we are not seeking independence or separation, we are very much satisfied if they provide us certain rights within the ambit of autonomy. We are very much working with the Chinese. Our main concern is preservation of our culture, spirituality and environment.

Karan Thapar: *Which is why all Tibetans must be together?*

Dalai Lama: Yes.

Karan Thapar: *I understand your attitude, I understand your response to the Chinese PM. Let me now put before you a problem. You are already 71. The Chinese say the age is against you and time is on their side.*

"Unfortunately, among Tibetan people—particularly among the youth —there are signs of growing frustration." sort of interest."

Dalai Lama: That's okay. The Tibet issue is not my issue—as in, not an individual's issue or "old institution" sort of interest. No, it's not.

Karan Thapar: *So it will continue?*

Dalai Lama: Aah, whether the Dalai Lama institution will continue is up to people. As early as 69 I stated that whether the very institution of Dalai Lama should continue is up to people. This is not the issue. The issue is the six million Tibetan people.

Karan Thapar: *And that is important?*

Dalai Lama: So long the Tibetan people remain, this issue—unless you solve it practically and realistically—will remain.

Karan Thapar: *So in other words, don't hope that Dalai Lama will die and issue will end. The issue will continue.*

Dalai Lama: Yes, absolutely.

Karan Thapar: *Let me look briefly at the other side. You've advocated a middle way but young Tibetans say the middle way hasn't produced results. They are becoming impatient and are tired of living in exile. They want a more assertive and a more aggressive policy. They even talk about the need of using violence.*

Dalai Lama: Unfortunately, among Tibetan people — particularly among the youth — there are signs of growing frustration. But meantime, I tell them 'yes, your demands are right, doesn't matter'. But if they really want a different approach then they must assure us, the people the method step by step. That's not very clear.

Karan Thapar: *So, you are challenging the youth of Tibet by saying 'I understand your impatience, but if you want to influence policy, you have to do it systematically and show method. You have to show that you are capable of leadership.'*

Dalai Lama: That's right.

Karan Thapar: *Let me quote to you Your Holiness what you said in 2003 to a French reporter. You said 'If no results can be achieved in two or three years of negotiations, I would find it hard to explain*

to the young people that the middle way is effective.' Today, that two or three year period is over. Negotiations haven't started. So what do you say to the young today?

Dalai Lama: Concrete results have not yet happened. However, the support and sympathy among the Chinese is growing.

Karan Thapar: *I am not surprised Your Holiness that you see a silver lining on every cloud. Many people believe that the run-up to the Beijing Olympics of 2008 will give you the best opportunity for a settlement in China. Do you think you can grab that and make it happen or will 2008 slip away without settlement?*

Dalai Lama: Yes, many people are appealing for that, saying that before Olympics this is a possibility and after that things may become more difficult. Firstly, as I said, this is one nations' issue, we have an election every five years. So, if youth have serious programme, they must tell the public and let them elect an assertive leader. No problem.

Karan Thapar: *You are throwing a challenge to the youth aren't you?*

Dalai Lama: No, this is the truth. I admire them They are spirited, and are absolutely loyal to our nation. But sometimes they are little impatient.

Karan Thapar: *One quick question: You have been waiting patiently for 50 years to return home. Do you think in your lifetime you will see Tibet again?*

Dalai Lama: I think judging by today's development and developments in China, I am hopeful.

Karan Thapar: *You are an optimist.*

Dalai Lama: Yes, I am an optimist.

Karan Thapar: *And if you don't see Tibet again. If God forbid, you were to die without seeing your home again, would you be unhappy?*

Dalai Lama: No problem. I am a Buddhist monk, now over 71-years-old. These several years I have trained my mind according to Buddhist teachings. Doesn't matter.

Karan Thapar: *In November, when Hu Jintao visited India, the Indian Government went to extraordinary lengths to stop Tibetan protests. Tenzin Tsundue, one of your more colourful protestors, was even barred from leaving Dharamsala. Do you think that it is proper that the world's biggest democracy should have behaved in this way?*

Dalai Lama: Usually, I publicly express that the Government of India's attitude or policies regarding China in general and Tibet in particular are overcautious. Sometimes, of course, the Government's attitude creates more resentment among Tibetans.

Karan Thapar: *Has this created resentment among Tibetans?*

Dalai Lama: On several occasions in the past—sometimes due to some incident — there has been resentment among the Tibetan community. It is then that I tell them to look at the Government of India from a holistic point to view. In certain fields, the Government of India's policies disappoints us, but if you take a holistic view, the Government's policies over the last 50 years have been very helpful.

Karan Thapar: *Looking at the Government of India's overall policies towards Tibet holistically—as you said—do you think that the time has come for the Indian Government to revise its Tibet policy or at least redirect it?*

Dalai Lama: I think the Government of India's policies towards Tibet since early '50s, and particularly in '54, are difficult to change. Even if certain mistakes were committed at that time, it is difficult to change them. However, it is very important to review the policies from time to time.

Karan Thapar: *So, it is important to review the policies from time to time?*

Dalai Lama: Yes.

Karan Thapar: *Let me quote to you Brahma Chellaney, one of India's better known thinkers, who writing in The Times of India during the Hu Jintao visit said, "The only way that India can build counter-leverage against Beijing is to quietly reopen the issue of China's annexation of Tibet and its subsequent failure to grant autonomy to the Tibetans."*

He added that New Delhi can diplomatically make the point that China's own security and well being will be enhanced if it reaches out to the Tibetans and concludes the deal which brings the Dalai Lama back. Do you agree with that sentiment?

Dalai Lama: That sounds very nice, whether it's realistic or not I don't know.

Karan Thapar: *But it sounds nice?*

Dalai Lama: It sounds nice.

Karan Thapar: *And you wish that the Indian Government would listen to it carefully?*

Dalai Lama: That's up to the Indian Government.

Karan Thapar: *But the smile suggests that the answer is yes, even if diplomatically you can't say so. Your Holiness, a pleasure talking to you on Devil's Advocate.*

Dalai Lama: Thank You.