Breaking the Tibet myth

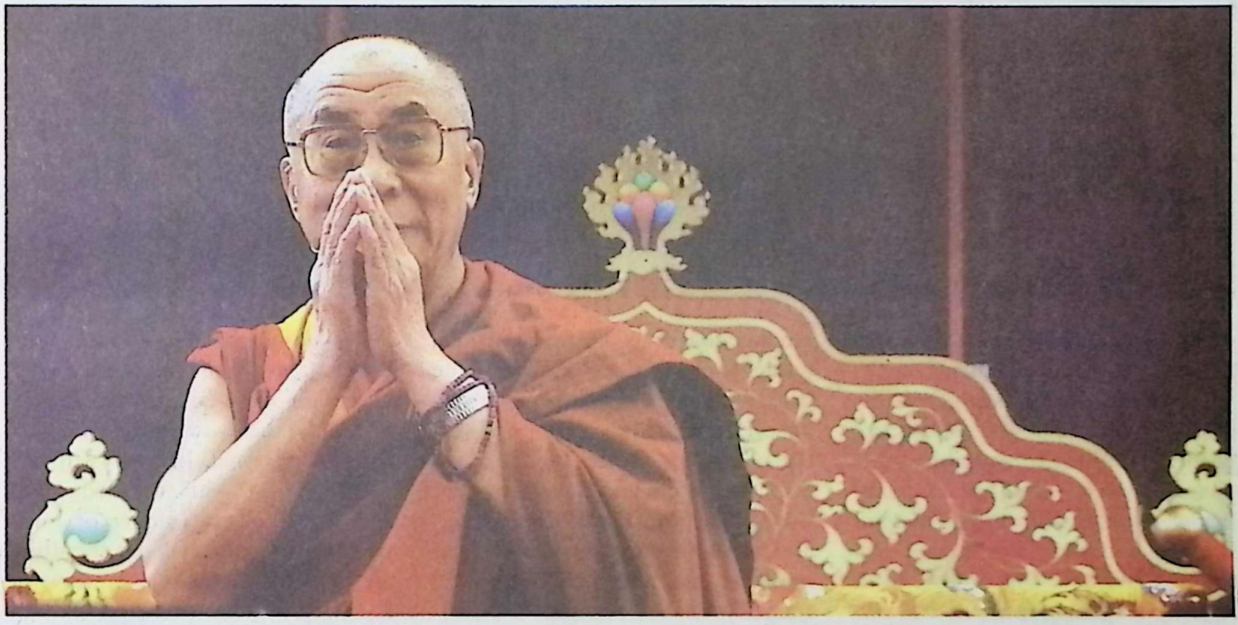
Wasfia Nazreen tells us what's going on and why we should care

"TIBBAT *ki azadi, Bharat ki shurokhkha! Tibbat ki azadi, Bharat ki shurokhkha*!"
(Tibet's freedom is India's protection) and so continued the chants of the marchers as they proceeded down the serpentine path of this tiny Himalayan hill-town.

March 10. Another deja-vu scenario of the same old tradition of activities to be carried out for the National Uprising Day of Tibet. Since 1959, millions of refugees have crossed the mighty Himalayan ranges. And continue to do so today, fighting against mind altering conditions, in order to get away from the orders enforced by the Chinese government.

I have been stationed here for six months now. The picturesque Shangri-La may not be found here on this side of the Himalayas, yet a certain amount of peace in just about the right quantity seems to prevail in our lives here. It is not easy for a tourist to truly comprehend right away the amount of suffering most of the inhabitants of this area have gone through and still go through to some extent.

At around six, the morning routine of Kora starts; that is the circumambulation of the Tsuglakhang Temple, the main temple situated at McleodGanj, Dharamsala. Tibetans, mostly the older generation, gather, prostrating relentlessly and reciting "*Om Mani Padme Hum*" for the happiness of all sentient beings. Spinning prayer wheels, or the Mani wheels, are devices that have rolls of thin paper imprinted with numerous copies of the mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum* (in ancient Indian script or in Tibetan script) and are wound around an axle in a protective container, which is then spun around and around. The belief is that by rotating the wheel only once, the one praying is sending more Manis than could have been sent by reciting regular beads. These prayer wheels typically also have larger decorative versions of the syllables of the mantra carved outside the cover of the wheel.


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Tibetans, whether Buddhists or not, believe that saying this mantra out loud, or silently to oneself, or even visualising it, can invoke the powerful attention and blessings of Chenrezig, the embodiment of compassion. In the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon of enlightened beings, Chenrezig is renowned as the embodiment of the compassion of all the Buddhas, or the Bodhisattva of Compassion. A Bodhisattva, accordingly, is one who, after gaining nirvana, by choice decided to help other sentient beings of this world, and, thus, does not completely surrender to that state. It can almost be compared to having one foot in heaven and one foot on earth,